SHORT STORIES

No. 786. Week Ending January 23, 1904. Price One Penny.

She crept stealthily into the room, and with the candle set fire to the curtains of the bed wherein Malcolm lay.

(A Dramatic Incident from the Story, "The Woman with Dark Hair." See inside.)

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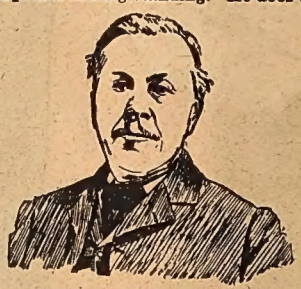

MR. JAS. COLE. *From a Photo.*

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HOME NOTES

(No. 523)

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Short Stories

No. 786.] [One Penny.

Week Ending January 23rd, 1904.

The Woman with Dark Hair.

Containing the Incident depicted on the cover.

A Fascinating Tale of a Terrible Deed.

Malcolm Strong was sitting on a seat on the Brighton front, and also, a little to his right, sat Hilda Sladen, playing with a half-read book.

When Malcolm glanced up, quite idly, he did not know, of course, that Hilda Sladen had been looking at him for some time, and had decided that he was certainly an ugly man, but with something of a chin. But he looked up; he could have sworn that, for a second, their eyes met; then she was at her book again so quickly that he could not be certain whether she had noticed him. Yet he had seen her eyes—dark eyes, and she had dark hair.

Presently she closed the book and got up from the covered seat. She began to walk slowly westward.

But in a few minutes Malcolm Strong went westward, too. He was a lonely, struggling artist, dependent on his work, which up to now had been a dependence rather frail.

Soon Malcolm passed the girl who had attracted his attention, and he slipped into a tobacconist's shop to buy some cigarettes. When he came out she was standing just outside, talking to a gentleman. It was Frank Duncan, an old friend of Strong's.

The former saw the artist and stepped forward to greet him, saying:

"Why, how do you do, Strong? Haven't seen you for an age! Let me introduce you to my cousin, Miss Sladen."

After about half an hour had elapsed, which time they had spent in strolling along the esplanade, Duncan announced that he had an urgent engagement to attend to.

Hence Malcolm Strong and Hilda Sladen, who had been so opportunely brought together, were left to themselves.

They sat down, and in five minutes Hilda Sladen thought that she might have known him all her life.

She was at Brighton for a month, on a visit to some friends with her mother. Very often a girl is lonely with her mother. They talked of books, of plays and of players that they knew. When he left her, he was to meet her that evening at seven o'clock.

Hilda Sladen was not often with her mother during the afternoons and evenings of the next three weeks. Malcolm lent her good books for herself to read, and books of wild excitement and great improbability for her mother, which reading the latter loved. He took her to Lewes to see the white monument on the hills which marks where martyrs were burnt, who cried bravely for their faith in their last hour; he told her of them that had died there.

"I love everybody who has suffered," cried she.

"Why, so do I," said Malcolm. "It's the one creed worth having."

Down the steep road to the station she was silent. But while they waited on an empty platform for the train she said:

"I'll be back in London this time to-morrow. And—in a week you'll have forgotten me."

"I seldom forget friends," said Malcolm. "I might have said the same thing to you."

"It would not be true as far as I am concerned," said Hilda Sladen.

He stopped. "I was very downhearted the day I met you," he said. "Such trying—and such failure. I was beginning to think that I had better throw away my tools."

"Never do that. You may be great and glorious some day." This was a phrase she had used before.

"I'm not so certain about that," he laughed. "But you've bucked me up tremendously. New ideas, my own ideas all sharpened, and new thoughts. It's three weeks ago, isn't it? Three weeks—I feel as if I had known you for years!"

"Do you know," she said, "I felt like that the third time I saw you, when we went right east to where the cliffs start."

"Yes," said Malcolm, "we've hit it off well together. It's been a splendid time. We've been good friends."

She turned and looked at Malcolm. They were in a secluded part. Her lips were half parted. Suddenly her arms were round him:

"I don't give kisses like that for 'friendship'!" said the woman with dark hair.

"You're very good," said Malcolm. "I didn't know; you make me proud." He put his hands upon her shoulders. "I've never told a woman lies. I'm sorry—but I can't give you as much as you give me."

"I'd better not see you again," said Hilda Sladen. "It's not your fault at all. It's mine—I'm stupid! You see, I thought I was proof against these things. I had better not see you any more," she repeated. She paused, and added: "But I can't stand being lonely." A woman's cry.

"It's as you please," said Malcolm gently.

"Do *you* want it to end now?" she asked him fiercely.

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He shook his head.

"You are so different. You're sure you don't want it to end—you're sure you're not tired of me yet?"

"Quite sure."

"I must see you now and then." For he had told her he was going to London. "I'll be so good; I won't worry you. And you will forgive me, won't you, for being so stupid?"

"*Forgive* you!" cried Malcolm, a very humble man.

"And you'll let me know the day you're coming to London? I want to see you the first evening you're there. If you'll only be patient with your work, I know you'll get on. I want to see you succeed. You will write and tell me, won't you? Don't disappoint me."

He did not answer for a minute.

"Don't write if you're tired of me already," she cried, and her eyes had changed.

"You might get tired first," said Malcolm, smiling. "I'm a very ordinary kind of man."

"You don't understand me yet."

"I'll write," he said.

He would have given half his life for the power to paint her eyes as they were when they had changed.

Malcolm went to London, to begin a stern campaign with editors, and he met her at a post office in the Strand.

They walked over Westminster Bridge, and he saw her into a tram for Brixton, where she lived. The next day he started on his fight, and he tramped six weeks from office to office before he sold a single drawing.

But it was a good drawing, and the honest approbation of the editor who bought it paid for that six weeks' worry. When it appeared many people looked in the corner for the signature, and said: "A new man."

When he told Hilda Sladen, she was more pleased even than himself. "I told you so," she said.

"Don't say 'great and glorious' again," said Malcolm, "because it makes me feel so small."

At another time he said to her: "When are you going to begin to hate me?"

She looked at him surprised.

"Sometimes, you know," said Malcolm, "your eyes change—oh, often your eyes change—and then they're fine; but it's then that you hate me!"

"Don't talk like that," said she.

"Why not? I should never be afraid of your hate."

"Why will you say such horrid things? There's one thing I want you to promise me. If another woman ever comes for you, and you feel—at last—I want you to let me know. I couldn't stand that—unless I knew at once. You've got that tiny gold cross I gave you?"

Malcolm nodded. It was the one present that had passed between them.

"If that ever happens—directly it happens—promise that you'll send me the gold cross. Promise!"

"It's a promise," said he.

"Then I shall know," said Hilda Sladen. "Don't write a word, don't put a date. Just send the cross, in one of those grey envelopes you use."

Malcolm began to get commissions and to sell his work. His own work, too; the style he wanted to do; and his joy was greater than words. He went for one paper to do a series of sketches of the pottery districts, the country and the people around Hanley. When he came back a regular berth was offered him.

This provided his living money. Further, he had an idea for one big picture that had long been in his mind. A picture of few colours, black and orange and grey. No hack work about this; it was to be his own creation.

With a friend he rented a cottage at Ditchling, in Sussex, and went down there to fight with the picture. He thanked Hilda Sladen for the way she had encouraged him. Her heart leapt at the success he had made; for long she could not speak, but then she murmured again of the gold cross.

And she said: "Is it the cottage that you showed me once, when we walked over the hills from Lewes? You said then that you would like to work there. There was a fine light."

"That's the cottage," said Malcolm. "I can't thank you enough for the way you've helped me. Good-bye."

* * * * *

For long weeks Malcolm struggled with his picture in the little cottage at the foot of the quiet hills. Often he was lonely there, because Derriel, his friend, was often called away to London. Slowly the picture grew.

He longed to get it done, to go out one morning and shout to the hills, "This is my work!"

The other woman comes into the story in the manner of a melodrama. One day Malcolm could not work. He went out and climbed the rough road over the Beacon; he reached the yielding earth on the top, and he was striking away from the line of the telegraph-posts when a speck came flying towards him from High Park Corner.

It was a girl on a horse with head down, furiously bolting. Great wedges of soft turf flew up from the horse's hoofs, and the horse was heading straight for the steep, zig-zag road down the Beacon.

She was nearer now. She had lost her hat; she had fair hair and a white face, and her lips were close shut. If she had lost her hat, her nerve was still her own; for she sat back resolute, tugging the useless reins, her eyes a real flame.

She sat back there with the pluck of all the world, a matter of seconds how long she could keep her seat. Certainly she could not keep her seat at that pace down the hill. And once off the turf, too, on the hard road, her horse must jar and stumble.

Malcolm cried out in himself with admiration for her pluck and the way she rode. And as she was almost on top of him, he took what seemed a hopeless chance—he leapt forward, forward and with a clear mind; from the first impact he had a bruise on his shoulder that lasted for weeks; his tense pull wrenched the animal's head round with such a jerk that the girl was nearly unseated. He was dragged forward; he dug futile heels in the turf, and was, of course, swept on again. Again he dug his heels in the ground; the resistance lessened, he was dragged on again, but cried to her: "Stick on!"

His body was like fire; from the sharp, intolerable pain there might have been the weight of all Sussex on his arm; but he stuck grimly to it.

And presently he was lifting her from the saddle. Then his right arm, that now he could not feel, dropped to his side. His face was whiter than her own; the blood ran from his lips where he had bitten them in his struggle; she stood breathless and panting, and said:

"That was magnificent!"

"If you had lost your head I could have done nothing. What was the matter with your horse?"

He was holding the bridle by the left hand, and now the horse was blown and quiet.

"I don't know," she said. "I came out alone. He was very fresh this morning. Back there, I think there was a piece of paper fluttering on the road, and then he was off."

"You feel all right?"

"Splendid!" she laughed. "Now that it is over."

Malcolm's heart was big at her wonderful pluck. But, still holding her horse, he stooped down and touched a blood-stained spur.

"It was that more than the paper, I'll be bound," said he. "What do you want a spur for with a horse like yours? He was frightened at the paper, but he bolted at the spur which you did not know you were using so. Here's his side all marked. And every time you touched him with it he wanted to bolt the more."

"How beautifully you lecture."

"It's a lecture you ought to have," he retorted, and now they were smiling at one another. "It's all right, as it happened—and you ride very well, but there's no one can ride well enough to take the Beacon at a gallop."

"You're quite right, but I've not asked you if you are hurt."

"My arm's nearly pulled out," said Malcolm. "That's all."

"I'm so sorry."

"It's lucky I was about," said he.

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"I'm not going to ride any more this morning. I shall walk back home."

He waited. His eyes said: "Where's home."

Reading the question, she said: "It's not far—not very far—that is. Just at the beginning of the Common."

"The big white house?"

She nodded.

He brought the reins forward over the horse's head, looped his uninjured arm through them, and they went back to the big house together. On the way they passed his own little cottage; he told her of himself and his work.

"May I come in some day," said she, "and look at the picture?"

"Certainly," said Malcolm. "When it is finished."

Her name was Betty Ingram, and she lived in the white house with her father, a kindly, middle-aged man, retired five years ago from Indian woods and forests.

"It was nothing," Malcolm said to him.

"It was a great deal," said Mr. Ingram, and looked at his daughter, who had explained things. The colour was in her face again.

That day Malcolm found he could not work on the picture at all. Indeed, the total of his day's work was five sketches of Miss Betty Ingram. Betty Ingram on horseback, Betty Ingram as she had stood talking to her father, study of a face with fair hair (Betty Ingram's face), and so on.

When he had done these sketches, he looked at them carefully, swore to himself, and deliberately tore them up.

Two months afterwards he sent to Hilda Sladen in London the gold cross.

But no word came from her in reply.

* * * *

Winter came upon the Sussex hills, but could not rob them of their green, and gave a wonderful rich brown to the turned earth. Winter and dark nights, and damp and cold, but Malcolm, the picture done (and he knew that it was good), said that it was good to be alive.

He was a man worth notice in the papers now. The struggling was behind. And the papers gave a paragraph to his engagement, and another, later, to his marriage, which was to be at an early date.

It was on the last day of the old year that the dark-haired woman came by a slow train from London and left it at Hassocks.

I do not know that she had any set purpose in her mind. She came really against her will; she had been near Victoria since the early afternoon, irresolute, despising herself because she had repeated to herself over and over again that she must see him for the last time. Only this purpose then; how could she let him go for ever without seeing him once more?

"He might have written," she said. But then she remembered that she had not written after he had sent the cross, and by that he might have thought she had not wished to hear from him.

She knew the way to the cottage. She learnt that Malcolm was there by himself. When at last she reached it, it was late, and the cottage was black and lonely, no lights showing from its windows. He was asleep, then. Could she not just see him without his knowing, and then go? What could be wrong in that—was it not her right, who had loved him first?

Malcolm had found no need for security of the cottage with the four rooms, and the two rooms knocked into one, which made his studio. Hilda Sladen found her way in through an unlatched window.

She stumbled against a little table in the dwarf passage from the door, and waited breathless, fearful of any movement to tell her she had been heard. Then she struck a match, and found a candlestick on the table. With that in her hand, she went cautiously upstairs.

The little house was full of ghosts as she went, stair by creaking stair. She longed to cry out, to wake the house, to bring turmoil upon the awful darkness that pressed upon her, upon the more awful lights that the candle sent dancing up the walls. And she knew that control had gone from her; she knew that she must see him; she did not care for anything, because she knew that she was mad.

His room was unlocked. Carefully she crept in, holding the candle to throw the light between the curtains, and stood long looking down upon him who lay sleeping there.

Malcolm slept on his side, not stirring. For a long time she waited there, scarcely breathing, dry-eyed and terrible.

She left the room at last, and went as carefully down the stairs. And she was at the foot of the stairs when a thought came to her and shook her, and she whispered it in her madness to the walls. Her mood changed; the thought came like a storm and gripped her, and would not let her be—this thought to end all, perhaps for her as well, but certainly for him.

"When will you begin to hate me?" he had said to her long ago. And the hate, the sweeping hate that was not really of her own will, came to her now, in a lonely house of terror, while the old year died.

She took off her hat and coat, and put them on the table, and went upstairs again. He slept still. She stood shaking now, altogether uncontrolled, a child of rage.

She held up the candle and set fire to the curtains of the bed. The flame ran along the beaded fringe, caught and then stopped, caught again in earnest, and then the curtains flamed fairly to the ceiling. Now she stumbled out and down the stairs, heedless of noise, but could get no further than the door, which she had opened.

Her coat was on somehow, but all power to move had gone from her, as she stood and gripped the table in the passage with bloodless hands.

Suddenly Malcolm woke. He was aroused either through that noise on the stairs or through the smoke with which his room was quickly filling. He tore the curtains down. They ripped from their rings upon the wide rod overhead, and lay, a blazing heap, upon the floor. He leapt across the room for the water jug, emptied it over them, and trampled out the dull red. Nothing else had caught.

Wondering, but only half-awake, he slipped into his things. When he had dressed, he looked about for reasons, and then was conscious of the bitter draught that came up the stairs into his room. And there was another light beside his own, which he had been too stupid to notice. It came from the candle upon the table in the passage.

And in the passage he came upon the woman with dark hair. "You know me at my worst," she cried "Don't say anything, don't speak; I set fire to your room. Now, I'm glad you're safe. For I tried to go upstairs to put it out but I could not move."

He could not speak.

"But when I lit your curtains I meant to kill you. Don't be afraid I shall trouble you any more. I'm wicked, I'm bad. There's the gold cross. Just take it back for memory—you will take it back, won't you?—it's the last you'll hear of me. I think it's in my blood to be bad. I'm going before a priest. Good-bye!"

She went through the open door, on to the winter road. And the little gold cross shone in the candle-light.

But Malcolm went back to his room and dressed, and waited for the light. It was past seven o'clock when the grey broke into the beginning of the day.

He took a stick and went out towards Ditchling Common. Suddenly there was a flutter of a dress at the iron gates, and a girl came from the big white house towards him. It was Betty Ingram.

"Oh," she cried, when she saw him. "I've been awake a long time. I couldn't sleep—I've dreamt such dreams about you. All sorts of dreadful things were happening. You don't know how glad I am to see you."

"I'm as glad to see you. I couldn't sleep either. How strange a coincidence!" said Malcolm, and took her in his arms.

But he never thought fit to tell her of how the dark-haired woman came to him that night. So the story is written here—a story of two women who loved.

Herbert Shaw.

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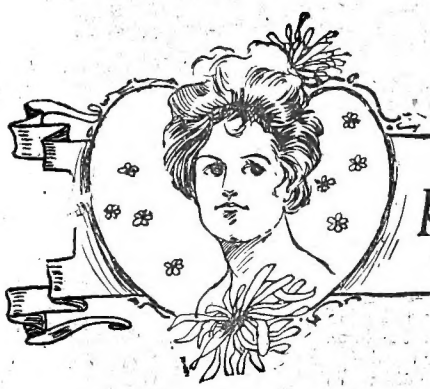

A Paragon of Perfection.

Being the Tale of an Idol Whose Feet Were of Clay.

"I DON'T like your paragon," said Winnie's father; "he is too perfect!"

And when Mr. Bradley said a thing he said it decisively, as much as to say that he meant it.

Winnie bent her pretty face a little more over her sewing—perhaps to hide a blush, perhaps not. Her father lit his pipe, which had gone out while he had been making the long speech of which the above words formed the conclusion.

"But everyone says he's good-looking and clever," ventured Winnie, without looking up from her work.

"A band-box dandy!" exclaimed her father with emphasis. "I don't care what everybody says of him; I've told you what I think."

Anyone but Winnie would have thought him angry, but Winnie knew her "dad" too well. She dropped her sewing, and, crossing over to the big chair in which he sat, she put her pretty cheek to his, and one arm about his neck.

"But I like him," she murmured, in the most winning of voices, and with the least accent in the world upon the personal pronoun. Mr. Bradley laughed and kissed the soft cheek that was so temptingly near him.

"You little witch," he said, "wheedling round your poor, simple, old dad once more!"

Winnie Bradley laughed, a little, soft, happy laugh, like the music of a brook in summer.

"Oh!" she whispered; "say 'yes,' dear daddy!"

And that was how "daddy" consented to his daughter's engagement—with the condition that a whole year was to elapse before marriage was even to be mentioned with Algernon Tempest, whom all Deephurst regarded as "a paragon of perfection."

How and in what fashion Mr. Algernon Tempest had acquired the honour of this appellation must be described.

He was handsome, though in a somewhat effeminate way.

His moustache was small, but elegantly trimmed and curled. He dressed to perfection. He could sing a little, play a little, do a hundred little things passably well. Nature had given him a fine pair of eyes and the knowledge of how to make use of them; a well-set-up figure, curly hair, and a blandness of manner which women took for civility and men for servility. And to conclude with, as if all these distinct advantages were not sufficient, he possessed an easy berth and a fair income.

"Such a man ought not to be lucky in love," said Deephurst society. But, strange to say, Algernon Tempest had come, had seen, and had conquered the heart of the prettiest girl in the place! Of a truth, it did not seem quite fair, but it was the fact all the same.

Winnie Bradley, only daughter of John Bradley, of Bradleys' mill, and the cynosure of all the young men's eyes, the desire of all their hearts, for miles around, had been captivated by the newcomer, and—well, hence the "yes" reluctantly wrung from daddy's lips.

And Winnie loved him. She thought him perfect, as most girls think their first lover. For Ronald, as she called him, at his request—he did not care for his first name, he said—was her very first lover, if not her first admirer.

But not one of her admirers had ever gone so far as to be constituted anything like a lover. No wonder Winnie's face flushed, and her heart beat and trembled, when Ronald told her that he loved her. Foolish little heart! Then he had laid his suit before John Bradley, and honest John Bradley, though he felt he for some unknown reason despised and had a kind of contempt for him, had said nothing of it, and had told him he would talk it over with Winnie. It must be said that Winnie's lover had pleaded his cause well—almost eloquently. That was another of his gifts. But the engagement was to be only a conditional one.

Winnie stole away from her father's side with a glance at the clock, after that "yes" had been spoken. In an hour she would meet her lover, at their usual trysting-place, the wooden bridge that crossed the millstream.

"What will Ted say?" said Mr. Bradley suddenly. Winnie started.

"I had forgotten him," she said.

"I hadn't," said Mr. Bradley drily.

There was a silence. What would Ted Warrender say indeed, Winnie was thinking. Her bright face suddenly went serious. He would say a good deal, and that not of a pleasant kind. Not that Winnie had ever thought of him as a lover, nor had she given him any encouragement. But she knew he loved her. So did her father know it as well. Poor Ted! There was a blow in store for him when he came home.

Ted Warrender was the son of John Bradley's greatest friend, and when Richard Warrender died, leaving a boy of nine alone in the world, John Bradley adopted him. Winnie, then a curly-haired mite of three, tyrannised over him, teased him, played games with him, wandered about Deephurst woods, gathering wild flowers with him. When seven years later he left school and went to China, Ted left his little playmate a shy little maiden of ten. He came home twice during the next ten years, the second time to find her a beautiful girl of eighteen. And he went back to China for the third and last time with her sweet face engraved on his heart for ever. And now he was coming home for good to settle down in England; and Winnie had forgotten him. And she wondered—even hoped that he had—if he had forgotten her.

What would he say, indeed! He had never seen, probably never heard of Mr. Algernon Tempest. How would his dainty ways, his affected little mannerisms, strike him, was what was in Mr. Bradley's thoughts. Grimly he imagined that they would not appeal favourably to the stronger natured man who had seen the world. And John Bradley almost chuckled when he thought of their meeting.

But Winnie? Her thoughts were very different indeed. She pictured sturdy Ted Warrender lost in admiration of her lover's handsome face and personal charms. So strangely does love blind us all!

Winnie met her lover at the appointed time, with her news. Ronald Tempest kissed her, and put his arms round her. But he was not excited. He was not an ardent lover by any means, feeling that all such display of emotion was "bad form" and "not the thing." But Winnie was too

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much in love with him to notice his somewhat calm demeanour.

They strolled away, and she slipped her arm through his. But even this he did not much care about.

"Are you not glad, Ronald?" she asked him gently.

"Of course I am, dearest, but I do think the year is absurd."

"But daddy wishes it!"

"Oh, of course, I know, if Mr. Bradley insists, it must be so. And, after all, he may relent later, dear."

Winnie looked up in his handsome face adoringly. She was a little shorter than her lover, and in response to her gentle pressure of his arm, he looked down upon her with a certain light of tenderness in his eyes.

"I hope so," she murmured.

"And now—the ring," her lover said; "look, Winnie dear; I bought it last week in town."

Winnie's blue eyes shone with love and delight as her lover produced a little case with a shining diamond ring in its velvet hiding place.

"Oh!" she cried; "but will daddy let me wear it?"

"He must let you."

"But——"

"I don't intend to let all the young men of the town be running after you, now you belong to me."

The dictatorial arrogance of this speech Winnie took for the pride of having won her, poor little woman! And after this tiny little momentary difference she tried her best to make up to him for what she thought was her unkindness to her lover! She clung to him even yet more closely, though Mr. Algernon Tempest did not respond in any great degree.

"Oh, bother!" ejaculated Winnie's lover five minutes later. But Winnie had been so busily employed gazing at her lover's handsome face that she had not noticed what he said.

Suddenly a very familiar figure caught his gaze. It was that of Mr. Algernon Tempest, and he was not alone!

A little four-year-old girl was sitting by the side of the wood through which the lovers were strolling. The path was broad and the grass underneath their feet was green, but the little maid was crying bitterly. Winnie slipped her hand out of her lover's arm in an instant, and ran to the child.

"What is it, dearie?" she asked tenderly, putting her pretty arms round the forlorn little mite.

"Please, I'se lost," said the little maid with yet more tears.

"Oh, don't cry! That will never find you!" said Winnie in haste; "who are you and who brought you into this pretty wood to see the flowers growing and hear the birdies sing?"

Baby gave a big sob and Winnie dried her eyes for her. In the meantime Mr. Algernon Tempest stood aloof, looking very indifferent, and somewhat displeased.

"Come along, Winnie," he remarked, after the tears had been dried and the little maid comforted.

"And leave this dear little mite alone?" said Winnie, facing her lover.

"Oh, bring it along with you if you wish," replied the lover.

I wish I could only reproduce in cold words the sulky face of Mr. Algernon Tempest and the pitying one of Winnie Bradley. But I cannot. The trio wended their way back to Deephurst, the four-year-old mite clinging to Winnie's hand tightly, but looking now and again at Mr. Tempest on the other side of her with a certain curious glance of awe, intermingled with repulsion. Mr. Algernon Tempest was not a favourite with children.

"Oh, I am home now!" said the mite, when they at length reached the high road; "I am found again!"

Winnie laughed, a bright laugh of sincere amusement, but Mr. Algernon Tempest only smiled.

"Do you know where you are now, baby?" said Winnie.

"Oh, yes. Me know. There's home—and mother!"

And she put her pretty little face up for a kiss, which Winnie gave her over and over again.

* * * * *

"So you are engaged?" said Ted Warrender quietly.

"Look!" answered Winnie; and she showed him the ring on her finger. "Won't you wish me happiness, Ted?" she pleaded, as he turned away. How was she to know that he cared for her?

Ted Warrender came back to her side, and held out both his hands.

"You know, Win, what I wish you—now and always."

Somehow, the sound of the old name, the name that no one but Ted had ever called her, went through Winnie's heart. But she battled bravely with the sudden strange feeling that had come over her, and made an attempt to laugh. But he dropped her hands.

"You have not seen Ronald?" Winnie said.

"Not yet," said Ted, with a half smile. "Do you expect me to fall in love with him too? That's asking rather too much."

It was a fortnight after Winnie's engagement, and Ted Warrender had only been back in Deephurst a few hours. But the first thing he had noticed was a ring upon Winnie's engagement finger; and his heart, that had hitherto been light and hopeful, had sunk to the bottommost depths of misery at the sight of it. He had come home with big hopes in his thoughts, with dreams of happiness, visions of gladness, but he never once had thought of—this!

"I wish you every happiness," he said, with an effort, and went away. But all that evening, even when with her lover, her affianced husband, Winnie could not forget the look upon his face, and the tone in which he uttered those few words.

"What a terrible infliction your friend, Mr. Warrender, is!" remarked Winnie's future husband a few days later, after he had been introduced.

Winnie coloured a little. Much as she cared for her lover, she felt that his remark was not in good taste. Perhaps Mr. Algernon Tempest noted her hesitation.

"I mean," he said loftily, "he is so big, so brusque, so outspoken——"

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"So manly," suggested Winnie.

Her lover turned languidly to her.

"So you love manly men?" he said.

"Of course I do," said Winnie. "I like a man to be—well, a man!"

Mr. Tempest rose from his chair leisurely, and curled his dainty little moustache with forefinger and thumb.

"Well," he said deliberately, "there is no accounting for tastes. Some prefer this style, some that. But it is not always the manly-looking man who is the most manly!"

He gave this axiom forth with the assurance of a learned philosopher. Winnie ran to his side, and put her pretty arms round him. She kissed his cheek.

"Forgive me, Ronald," she said; "I am afraid I was unkind to you."

"You were," said her lover, "but it does not matter!"

* * * * * *

Ted Warrender did not conceal his aversion to Winnie's lover from anyone excepting from Winnie herself. He had so little in common with Mr. Algernon Tempest, and he despised him for his little affectations and fopperies, to which love had made Winnie blind. But he was too loyal to say so to her; and he cared too much for her, had he not been so, to give her pain. So he kept it from her, and hoped she would never know how passionately he loved her. He did not know of those two little incidents of which I have spoken, or perhaps they might have given him an even keener perception of Mr. Algernon Tempest's character, and a greater knowledge of how love can blind a woman to that which everyone sees but herself.

A month went by, and then there befell to Ted Warrender the task of solving the greatest problem that had ever presented itself to him. Be it remembered, poor Ted had scant reason to love "The Paragon," for he looked upon him as an interloper, and he sincerely disliked him. So that the problem, when it did come, was all the greater test of his loyalty and manliness.

He had to go to Dullingham, a big manufacturing town about fifty miles away, on business. This transacted, he found that he had an hour to waste before he could catch a return train. So he amused himself by strolling about the crowded streets, looking into the shop windows.

Suddenly a very familiar figure caught his gaze. It was that of Mr. Algernon Tempest, and he was not alone. A feminine arm was resting within his own, and a girl's face was looking up into his affectionately. And the first thought that knocked at the heart of Ted Warrender was that the lovers had come over to Dullingham together.

He looked again, and his heart very nearly stood still. For the face was not that of Winnie Bradley. Ted hesitated a moment, then he made up his mind. Stepping quickly forward, he spoke to "The Paragon."

"Hullo, Tempest, you up here as well as myself!"

"The Paragon" started, coloured, and being, in spite of his bravado, a coward at heart, drew his slight figure up stiffly and with an assumption of hauteur, replied:

"Pardon me, my name is not Tempest!"

Ted stood and looked at him straight in the face for a moment.

"I beg yours," he said, and he contrived to put a certain sarcastic accent on the words which conveyed, just as Ted had desired, the fact that Mr. Algernon Tempest had been recognised. Ted lifted his hat and walked quickly away, his heart in a tumult. What was he to do—what should he say?

Tell Winnie? He dared not; and if he did, how would she take it? If she believed him, she would question her lover, who would of course deny it; and Ted would be branded with the stigma of having tried to part the lovers! And if he did not tell her, he would by his silence be permitting her to remain engaged to a man who was, while her newly affianced lover, upon closely affectionate terms with another girl.

Poor Ted! His was a problem indeed, and the more he thought it over that day, the more difficult it appeared to solve. Look at it which way he might, he could not come to a satisfactory decision. He journeyed back to Deephurst, keeping a watchful look-out for "The Paragon," with the question still unanswered.

To make his "assurance doubly sure," he, when two days later he happened to meet Winnie, put a casual question to her, in as indifferent a tone as he could command.

"Oh, by-the-way, was Mr. Tempest here on Tuesday afternoon, Winnie?"

"Why do you ask?" said the girl, blushing a little, as she always did at the mention of her lover's name.

"Oh, for no reason in particular."

"Let me think—this is Friday. No, I did not see him on Tuesday. He told me he was very busy over something or other—I quite forget now what; but why?"

'Oh, nothing! It's of no consequence."

While, during the next few days, Ted Warrender was trying to solve the problem that perplexed him, wondering if to lay it before Mr. Bradley, Fate was preparing an utterly unforeseen solution of her own. It was a bright afternoon, and Winnie and her lover were strolling idly along the path beside the mill-weir, "The Paragon" holding forth loftily, and Winnie, as was her wont, listening to him admiringly. A little group of children were playing in the field on the other side of the mill-stream, their hands full of wild flowers they had gathered in the wood beyond.

Suddenly a piercing scream caused Winnie and her lover to look up. The "mite"—the little four-year-old whom Winnie had brought home when lost, much to the disgust of her unsympathetic lover—had overbalanced and had fallen into the mill-stream.

"Save her! save her!" exclaimed Winnie, grasping in a moment what happened. She turned instinctively to her lover. But he only stood, pitifully white, a craven, shivering with fear, and dumb.

Winnie's eyes flashed at him a glance of withering scorn.

"Then I will!" she cried, and she plunged into the running stream in an instant. With quick wit, she had run a few yards up the bank first, so as to get ahead of the little form being carried to the weir. Cumbered as she was, Winnie struck out bravely.

"Don't!" whined "The Paragon" on the bank.

"Out of the way, you cur!" said a strong voice behind him, and the shock of a form rushing past him sent him sprawling on the path. "Go and get help, you fool!"

But by the time he had reached the mill, and help had arrived, Ted Warrender was clinging like grim death to a stake in the bank, with one arm round Winnie's waist, and Winnie was clutching at the "mite's" drenched little figure.

When help arrived, it was a matter of a few moments to drag the trio, wet and exhausted, but safe, to the pathway.

"Winnie! Winnie!" exclaimed Ted Warrender hoarsely. "Thank God that I was at hand!" But Mr. Algernon Tempest had slunk away.

* * * * * *

"The Paragon" had two very unpleasant interviews that evening. The first was with Ted Warrender, to whom after some tears and a poor show of bravado, he confessed that he had been at Dullingham.

"And you are making a fool of Winnie Bradley as well as of some other girl!" exclaimed Ted hotly. "Well, you will quite understand it is at an end now."

"That is for Miss Bradley to say."

"Or her father!" said John Bradley, coming into the room.

"The Paragon" fell limply into the nearest chair.

"There is your engagement-ring, and I am requested by my daughter to inform you that she never wishes to see your face again!"

He threw the ring at his feet with a gesture of contempt.

That was a year ago, and "The Paragon" has long since disappeared from Deephurst. Winnie's fancied love for him is dead. But Ted has never told her of that meeting in Dullingham, though he thinks he may do so, some day—when she has said "Yes."

Clifton Bingham.

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SPLENDID NEW SERIES. **BEGIN READING TO-DAY.**

A Striking Series of Astonishing Revelations.

Told by the Decoy Herself.

SYNOPSIS.

VIVIENNE D'ALTON, who in this series tells the story of a certain period of her life, is a young lady who has been educated in Germany.

Until the time when the story commences, she has never seen her father since he placed her at the school in Bochum, although her fees are paid regularly and she has a liberal allowance of pocket-money.

Her mother is dead, and she has no brother or sister. Hence, she seems quite alone in the world.

But one day her father sends a message to the school that he wishes his daughter to leave and to meet him at Rotterdam. Vivienne is greatly delighted at the news, and while she sails down the Rhine to meet her father, conjectures as to his appearance.

The person who announces himself as her father at Rotterdam is not in the least like the handsome gentleman she had pictured to herself, but is short and stout.

They drive to a large mansion, where Vivienne is enthusiastically welcomed by a Mrs. Sherwood, "a bosom friend of her mother," who requests Vivienne to call her "aunt."

Vivienne takes an instantaneous dislike to "Aunt Flora."

A Mr. Gilbert Graysworthy comes to dine at the house, and incidentally mentions that round his waist he carries a belt containing fifty thousand pounds' worth of diamonds.

A day or two later Vivienne is shocked to learn that Gilbert Graysworthy has been found murdered in the street! There seems no motive for the crime, for his money, his watch and chain are still upon his body.

Aunt Flora shows great annoyance that Vivienne is so concerned in the gentleman's death, and vents her spite on Susan, the maid, by dismissing her.

Vivienne, however, to show her independence, engages the girl herself as her own lady's maid, for which kindness the latter is very grateful.

She and Aunt Flora leave Rotterdam for England by the Harwich boat.

On the passage across Vivienne sees a person whom she believes is Annchen, a maid whom she greatly dislikes, talking to a man whom she has seen before under very suspicious circumstances.

She also meets a Viscount Broomville, a fellow-passenger whom Aunt Flora seems to wish to impress. He is most attentive to Vivienne, and she forms a very high opinion of the Viscount as a true born gentleman.

He announces that he is going to call upon Mr. Beverley D'Alton regarding some business affairs.

THIRD EPISODE.
The Decoy Enters Her Den.

I HAD often dreamt of London glories and had read of the splendours which money could procure. But I had neither dreamt nor read of such a marvel of beauty as my new home in Park Lane was.

The moment one entered the house one was impressed by its magnificence. The fine hall was lined with wonderful frescoes by the greatest artist of the day, and the fountain which played in the centre had its tiny jets turned into fairy rainbows by myriads of gem-like electric lights, which lurked amongst the palms and flowers banked up in lavish profusion. Rich sapphire blue velvet portières veiled the great mahogany doors leading into various rooms, and the grand staircase, which cost, so I was told, fifty thousand pounds, was a miracle of art in white and coloured marbles.

To tell the truth, I was almost spellbound with amazement at what I saw, and after I had been shown all over the house, I could well believe my father's assertion that he was the richest man in London.

"And you will have to be one of the busiest girls," he smiled, as he watched me look with shining eyes round the exquisite little boudoir which had been prepared for my special occupation.

"You seem to have quite an army of servants," I smiled back, "so I hardly know what there will be to keep me busy."

"My dear child, there is no earthly reason why you should worry about anything but your own pleasure. When I spoke of your being busy, I meant that you would have to do a tremendous lot of shopping amongst costumiers, milliners, and jewellers. Remember, my dear, that I always want you to look your best, no matter how much it costs. If you get what you want, and leave me to pay the bills, perhaps we shall both be happy."

"How good you are to me! I shall never be able to repay you!"

"Oh, yes, you will. You see, I am a gregarious animal in my own way, and the very fact of your living with me is part payment for anything I do for you. I have found it dreary work living alone while I was scraping my fortune together, and I mean to make up for all the privations of the past by surrounding myself with bright and happy faces."

"That means that you intend to entertain a great deal?"

"Certainly, though I have one peculiarity. A man of

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wealth always has innumerable applications for help from all sorts of people, and I am no exception to the general rule. But I have an office in the City to which all such business communications are addressed, and all such people as wish to be helped on in the world must seek me there.

"By way of compensation for seeing so much of the seamy side of life in the City, I want everything here to be absolute brightness and content. No man who is not rich is content, so it follows that I only want rich men about us here. And every woman, to be happy, must have either beauty or good family to boast of, so you can select your friends accordingly. But, mind—no poverty and no discontent."

"Beverley, how long am I to wait for you to let me pass you?"

I had been so closely attentive to what my father was saying that I had not noticed Mrs. Sherwood standing just within the doorway, looking the reverse of contented.

He stepped hastily aside and apologised at once.

"My dear Mrs. Sherwood," he said, "I'm sure you will believe me when I say that I had forgotten all about everything except that it was necessary to explain my wishes to my daughter, who is not yet as well acquainted with social duties as you are."

I wonder if it was fancy, or whether there was really a hidden meaning in the way in which the words "Mrs. Sherwood," "My daughter," and "duties" were pronounced? There certainly was a very curious inflexion upon them all, and the speech had the effect of producing an instant change in Aunt Flora's manner, which promptly became as fawning as it had been just now aggressive.

"You poor dears!" she exclaimed theatrically. "I can quite understand that Vivienne is perfectly delighted and that you are wrapped up in her. But you have both forgotten that lunch will be served in a few minutes, and that we don't want the servants to see Vivienne sit down at table in her travelling dress."

"To be sure! You are quite right," was the cordial reply. "I'm evidently in the way, so I'll take myself off while Vivienne gives herself up to the attentions of her maid. By-the-bye, did you not say something about having invited Viscount Broomville to call here to-day?"

This question was addressed to me, and I answered: "No, father, I didn't exactly ask him. He said he had something to see you about, and would like to call, so, of course, I said we should be pleased to see him."

"Well, dear, it's all the same, and the more friends call to see you, the better I shall like it."

A genial smile accompanied this speech, which implied that I myself was the attraction which brought Viscount Broomville to Park Lane so soon, and I was certainly very much pleased at the idea, as every girl would be who has only just been emancipated from school.

While eating my lunch, I could not help smiling at the pleasure with which I had viewed the prospect of presiding over my father's household arrangements, for I should certainly have been hopelessly incompetent to deal with the butler, and the housekeeper, and the *chef*, and all their underlings; some of them evidently thought themselves much grander personages than ever poor dear Fräulein had considered herself.

But I did not feel disappointed. On the contrary, I looked forward to a life of happy gaiety, undimmed by a single responsibility or care, and when Viscount Broomville presented himself between four and five o'clock I was as beautifully dressed and as radiant as either my father or I could desire.

Mrs. Sherwood was also magnificent, in a rose-velvet tea-gown, but I fancied she did not look quite happy when she saw me, at my father's whispered request, begin to preside over the Sèvres teacups.

Our visitor seemed to have eyes for nothing but me, and he very evidently cared to talk to nobody else. In fact, I was beginning to be rather embarrassed by his open admiration, when rescue came in the shape of a question from my father

"Did I understand you to say, my lord," he asked, "that you did good business in Rotterdam?"

"Splendid!" was the reply, "I have netted at least twenty-five thousand pounds, thanks to your directions and recommendations. But I sha'n't want to visit Rotterdam again on business in a hurry."

"Why not?"

"Because I seemed to be pursued by the most extraordinary dangers. Twice I was attacked by footpads, and only my own agility saved me from being murdered. Another time I was stepping into a cab when I happened to look into the face of the man who held the door open for me, and actually recognised him as one of the desperadoes I had fought with on the previous evening."

"How very lucky for you—yet how extraordinary!"

"Yes, rather. But the manner in which I was constantly menaced was more than extraordinary. It was significant."

I was listening breathlessly, for I recalled, only too vividly, the tragic end of that other young Englishman whom Fate had taken to Rotterdam. Aunt Flora had walked to the window, no doubt to gaze upon the ever-moving crowds in the Park. But my father seemed as much interested as I was, and he inquired promptly:

"Significant? Of what do you consider the attacks were significant?"

"Of deliberate shadowing," was the confident reply. "I feel absolutely certain that somebody must have known that I carried a lot of valuable property about with me."

"Of course. The people at the hotel knew. They have a happy knack of shadowing their guests, and if any of them saw you visiting the different diamond merchants, they could easily guess that you either had money to buy diamonds, or that you had diamonds to sell. You will remember that I warned you to be careful. However, you have luckily reached England again, and are no doubt going to invest your money to good advantage."

"I should like to ask your advice, if I may. You are the great authority on investments, and people are beginning to say that everything you touch turns to gold, so if——"

"My dear Viscount, I'll advise you with pleasure, if it will be any use to you. The fact is, I'm putting a lot of money into the 'New Barbary Land Development Co.' It is not thought much of just now, and shares are below par. But they'll fetch a huge premium in another week, and I shall sell out with a cool profit of a million. But, mind, this is in strict confidence."

Viscount Broomville became very excited at the prospect of another great "scoop," as he called it, which was thus opened out to him. But some fresh visitors were announced, and there was only just time for him to arrange to call at my father's office in the morning, ere it became impossible to talk further about business without being overheard.

* * * * *

I suppose I was not the first girl to be sprung upon Society with a tremendous flourish of paragraphs, or whose social success, by reason of the money at her command, was a foregone conclusion. But I certainly was amazed at my own sudden popularity, and could not understand how it was that half a dozen high-class weeklies sported a full-length portrait of "The beautiful Miss Vivienne D'Alton, who is just making her *début* in Society."

Later on I learnt that all this kind of thing is a matter of management. If you haven't a capable relative to blow your social trumpet, you employ an agent, and the miracle is wrought!

But even fabulous wealth is not all-powerful, and my father soon realised that the great party with which he was going to signalise my advent would be much more successful if I were chaperoned by a lady of title. Mrs. Sherwood was very angry at the idea. But "dear Beverley" was firm, and Aunt Flora found her authority on social matters superseded by the Dowager Countess of Windelmore, a lady of undoubted ready-made influence.

The Countess had but a small jointure, and when my father in his tactful way invited her to pay us a visit of indefinite

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length, with an honorarium of two hundred pounds a week "for personal expenses," she readily consented to do her best for me.

Upon the whole she found me very docile, and only too delighted to exploit fresh fields and pastures new. But the splendours with which I fell in love at first sight soon began to pall upon me. So did the perpetual supervision to which I seemed to be subjected, and I longed to be just a bit like other girls who could walk about the beautiful park and its environs instead of always being driven in a splendid carriage.

So strong did this desire become that I excused myself one evening from going to the opera, on the plea of being tired and out of sorts. My father was evidently disappointed, but, after enjoining me to go to bed, so as to be as fresh as possible the next day, he accompanied my two chaperons to the opera, and I was actually to be left to my own devices for several hours.

Suddenly sense and speech returned to me, and I cried out "Lord Broomville, remember Rotterdam!"

I might have been sleepy before, but I became wide awake at once when my somewhat foolish plan seemed easy of fruition.

Annchen and Susan gladly took their dismissal when I told them I should not want them until eleven o'clock, and I lost no time in putting on a dark cloak and the least conspicuous hat I possessed.

Then, with my face all aglow with the spice of mischief that was in me, I watched my chance to slip down the marble staircase, across the tesselated hall, and out of doors, without being seen by the big footman who was supposed to be doing his duty, but who had no doubt gone to flirt with pretty Susan.

Oh, how delightful it was to be out in the cool night air, free from the blaze of jewels and electric garishness! I was not afraid of coming to grief, for there were still any amount of people both driving and walking, and a brisk constitutional was all I meant to indulge in.

But something occurred which convinced me that my schoolgirlish escapade was providentially inspired.

At the foot of Park Lane I turned to the right, and stepped briskly along, smiling at the thought of how horrified Lady Windelmore would be if she could see me now. I had almost gained the Albert Memorial when I saw, passing by a lamp across the street, the handsome, erect form of Viscount Broomville.

Almost at the same moment I brushed against two people who were so engrossed in watching his lordship that they paid no attention to a chance pedestrian, and I walked on without appearing to have seen them

But my heart was beating furiously, for the pair were no other than the birds of ill omen who had voyaged with us from Rotterdam. The woman I knew again by her cloak and by the curious hat which completely hid her face. The man I recognised by his face and figure, which could not easily be mistaken.

But why were they here? And why were they watching Viscount Broomville? Could it be that they intended to do him an injury? And was it possible that they were concerned in the previous attacks of which he had complained? If this were so, would it not be well for me to watch them in their turn, so that I might be on the spot to utter a warning?

Fired with this idea, I walked sharply on till I was sure they could not see me. Then I crossed the road and hurried townwards again, taking care never to let my face be shown by the lamps under which I had to pass.

My heart was palpitating horribly, for I feared lest some dreadful event were impending, and I was all the more frightened because I was utterly unused to being out alone after dark.

Anxiously looking ahead, I saw Viscount Broomville, by no means in a great hurry, walking leisurely in front of me. Across the way, the woman was hurrying off alone, and the other bird of ill omen was stealthily lessening the distance between himself and the Viscount.

Did the man really mean mischief, and if so, could I be in time to intercept his purpose? Anyhow, I meant to do so, even if I had to make an outcry and thus draw to myself the unwelcome attention which I was, of course, under the circumstances, anxious to avoid.

Slowly the first man went on, apparently in deep meditation. Swiftly his pursuer followed behind. And still more swiftly did I almost overtake the latter.

Even in much frequented neighbourhoods there are always some spots which, as night grows late, are fruitful in opportunities for the intending assassin, and one stretch of the roadside, which was entirely in darkness by reason of the distance of the street lamps, struck me as so specially dangerous that I quickened my pace to a run.

But so did the bird of evil omen, and as he wore some kind of noiseless footgear, there was nothing to warn the unsuspecting man ahead that he was in danger. My own shoes were too thin to make any clatter, but I was not so swift a runner as the man whom I believed to be an assassin, and I already despaired of overtaking him when I saw him draw something out of his pocket, and raise his arm ready to strike.

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For half a second I knew not what to do, for I was dumb with horror. Then sense and speech returned to me, and I shrieked out:

"Lord Broomville, remember Rotterdam!"

Instantly, as if turned on an electric pivot, his lordship faced his pursuer and threw up the arm already descending to kill him. Then he would have grappled with the fellow, but a face-to-face encounter was the last thing the latter desired, and, cleverly dodging further contact, he ran on until a turn into the next street hid him from our sight.

After giving my timely warning, I trembled so much that I only kept myself from collapsing altogether by leaning against the garden wall near which I had stopped, and when Viscount Broomville, in a few quick strides reached my side, I was trying vainly to restrain the tears which the reaction from terrible excitement had produced.

"Miss D'Alton," he said wonderingly, "you have saved my life, I am sure, and I can never thank you sufficiently! But it is amazing to see you here alone!"

"And I ought not to have been here," was my tremulous answer, "so I beg you will not say a word about this to anybody. But I'll tell you all there is to tell."

In a few minutes Lord Broomville had heard my story, at the end of which I said:

"The man is the same man I saw in Rotterdam, the night Mr. Graysworthy was murdered. He is very likely one of those who tried to take your life there, and has come over in the boat with you on purpose to secure the wealth he has perhaps heard about."

"In that case the rascal would have been disappointed, for I have nothing on me of great value to-night. In fact, I intrusted everything I could raise this morning to your father to invest in the New Barbary Land Development Company, so my money and securities are beyond the reach of thieves."

"It is a pity that that man has got off scot-free."

"Yes, but I couldn't leave you alone here while I pursued him, so must trust to better luck the next time he tries to play the assassin. And as you will be safer at home than here, we had better lose no more time."

"You will not say a word about having seen me?"

"Not a word, of course. But I shall never cease thinking of your courage and presence of mind."

Much to my relief my arrival was as unnoticed as my departure had been, for the footman was still amusing himself downstairs, and as soon as I reached my own room, I carefully put the cloak and hat where I had found them. I also removed every other trace of having been out, and then rang for my maid, although it was only half-past ten.

Susan answered my ring.

"Susan," I said, "bring me a tray with some supper on it; I am better now, and feel quite hungry. And tell Annchen that I want her."

"Please, miss," returned Susan, "Annchen hasn't come back yet. She thought she would go for a walk, as you didn't want her."

"But surely she doesn't have permission to be out till this time of night! Who told her that she might go?"

Susan wasn't able to answer my question satisfactorily. Neither did Annchen, when she presented herself half-an-hour later. But, looking at her, I was again seized by a most uncomfortable antipathy to her, for the resemblance between her and the accomplice of the bird of evil omen was disagreeably striking.

Yet, unpleasantly reminiscent as her personality was, I could hardly hope to rid myself of her presence, for she seemed to be as great a favourite with my father as she was with Aunt Flora, and, greatly to my surprise, I saw him talking very confidentially to her immediately after breakfast next morning when I went into the library to select a magazine.

"Very well, tell him that his stupid bungling has lost him five hundred pounds," I heard my father say.

Of whom was my father speaking to Annchen? And how was it that she seemed to be so much in his confidence?

(Another instalment of this entrancing series next week.)

A Young Man's Folly.

How a Scheme to Capture a Rich Bride Ended.

Handsome Hugh Duchesne lay swinging in a hammock under the trees that cast a wide shade over Duchesne Place.

He had been back just two days from a two years' sojourn on the Continent, and was enjoying the rest and calm to the utmost capacity of his idle, languid nature.

Under the shadows of the same tree sat his mother, a stately matron of sixty, the only human being of whom Hugh Duchesne had ever stood in fear.

"Hugh," said Mrs. Duchesne, "I have invited the Hildreths here for the summer. They will arrive very soon."

"Have you?" responded Hugh languidly, but his tone did not betray the annoyance his face expressed. He had gone abroad to escape these very Hildreths.

"Yes," continued Mrs. Duchesne. "Yes, they come to-morrow. I want you to go down to the station to meet them. Mrs. Hildreth is always so particular about having due respect shown to her, and I would not offend her for the world!"

"How many of them will there be?"

"Three; Mrs. Hildreth, her niece, Mrs. Gray—who is a young widow, and a beauty, I am told—and Carrie, who has just passed her twenty-first birthday, and has, therefore, come into possession of twenty-five thousand pounds left her by her father, you know."

"Yes, I know," assented Hugh, wearily. He had heard of that twenty-five thousand pounds every day for a year. He had been shown a portrait also of the prospective heiress, which had hastened his departure.

"I wonder," he asked, lazily, as he rocked himself lightly in the hammock, "if Miss Carrie has any more flesh on her bones than she used to have?"

"Hugh," cried his mother, "I supposed you were a gentleman. I am surprised to hear such an ill-bred remark from you. Carrie is a most estimable girl, and has good breeding and a kind heart, and——"

"And money," interrupted Hugh, "which covers a multitude of deficiencies in a woman, always."

"You will have an opportunity to determine before long," answered his mother, "whether money is not of some use after all. Duchesne Place will be under the hammer in less than two years, unless *something* is done to save it, and you and I will be beggars."

She gathered up her work, and swept away, as she finished, and Hugh, covering his eyes with his shapely hand, almost groaned aloud.

"Oh, my God, if she *knew!*" he moaned. But, mercifully, Mrs. Duchesne did not know.

Suddenly a voice broke the silence, trilling a snatch of song:

"*I love my love, I love my love,*
I love my love, because my love loves me."

This is what the voice sang. The singer came up the orchard path, and was almost within reach of the motionless figure in the hammock before she saw it.

Then she started back with a little smothered cry, and a face grown suddenly crimson. She blushed and paled so easily, did Flossie, the old gardener's young daughter.

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"You are very happy this morning, dearie," said Hugh, putting out his hand to her. "Come here and let me look at you. I have not had a chance of more than one glimpse of your face since I came home. Why, child, where has your flesh gone—you are as slender as a reed—you, who were so round and rosy. Have you been ill since I went away?"

"Oh, very ill!"

"They never wrote me of it."

"I was not here, I went away to my sister's—you remember her, she was Mrs. Tristan's governess. She married and lives in the country. I was with her a long time, resting and recruiting."

All the time Flossie's eyes had been turned away from the eyes of her listener, and the hand he held shook like a leaf in his.

"You are not strong yet, I see," he said kindly. "You must take good care of yourself, child; for you are too young to die; too young, too fair, too dear!"

Again a wave of colour swept over Flossie's sweet face. But just then a voice from the house called to her, and she hurried away.

"How changed she is—in some indefinable way," murmured Hugh, as he looked after her. "She seems so much older, somehow—poor child!"

He had known her from her childhood, and had made a pet of her long before he went away.

The next day the Hildreths came. Mrs. Hildreth, forty in years, and a thousand in Society-wisdom and experience; and with one supreme desire in her soul, which was to marry her daughter to Hugh Duchesne.

Carrie Hildreth came also, tall, thin, sallow, with pathetic eyes, that always seemed pitying her own plainness, which was rendered doubly noticeable by the richness of her toilets, and the lustre of her jewels.

Twenty-one in years, and looking thirty-five beside the splendid beauty of her cousin, Mrs. Gray.

Had it been possible to put Mrs. Gray out of the way, save by cold-blooded murder, Mrs. Hildreth would certainly have done it before she would have brought her to Duchesne Place. But she had invited her niece to spend the summer with them, before Mrs. Duchesne's invitation had been received, and she had been obliged to inform Mrs. Duchesne, therefore, of this, and to bring Mrs. Gray with her.

Lisle Gray was, indeed, a rival to be feared. She had that rare combination, blue-black eyes, golden hair, and a brilliant bloom. She had also a warm heart, that held all its stores of passion yet untouched, for she had been an old man's darling; and though she had sorrowed for her husband as for a friend and protector, it had been no more.

Something new stirred in Hugh Duchesne's heart and pulses when Lisle's cool, fair hand first touched his. Something that made him restless, and afraid to look into her eyes; and, therefore, he was all to Carrie that Mrs. Hildreth could desire.

He turned Carrie's music at the piano, and listened attentively to her beautiful voice, which was her one solitary charm. All a woman's love and power of feeling, and repressed longings were in her voice when she sang. And while Hugh Duchesne leant over her at the piano and listened she was singing her heart away; hopelessly, she knew—but, alas! she could not hold it back. It was her doom to love him, and she knew it from that hour. He was so kind to her for days, so thoughtful and attentive, and both her and her mother's heart leapt for joy.

Only Mrs. Duchesne saw the truth. Once she caught his eyes as they rested on Lisle Gray. She had never seen that look in his face before.

"Was your niece a wife long before she was a widow?" she asked carelessly of her friend that night.

"Only a year."

"How very sad!"

"No, not sad, for he was an old man and left her wealth," Mrs. Hildreth answered, and then could have bitten her own tongue off in her rage. She did not care, you see, for Mrs. Duchesne or Hugh to know that Lisle Gray was rich as well as beautiful.

"Well, not exactly wealth," she hastened to add, "but a competence—enough to dress her, and keep her in society. But she is very extravagant. It would require a fortune to support her. Luckily, she has a wealthy lover, now in India; and I am hoping, when he returns, she will marry him. But she is a sad coquette—for ever making victims to her beauty."

"Ah!" was Mrs. Duchesne's only comment. She knew her friend well, and made due allowance for her statement. And after this she looked at Lisle Gray with renewed interest.

"If she has wealth," she said mentally, "she is a far more desirable wife for Hugh than Carrie. All the Duchesnes for generations have married handsome women!"

A day later she was alone with Carrie. Mrs. Hildreth was taking her siesta; Lisle writing letters; and Hugh smoking his cigar.

"How beautiful your cousin is," she remarked. "Like a rare picture!"

"Yes," responded Carrie, with a sigh. "I sometimes think I would give all the remainder of my life to be, only for one year, as beautiful as she is."

"That is extravagant language," said Mrs. Duchesne "One cannot expect to have everything. Some have beauty, some mental gifts, some wealth, some position. Few have all."

"But Lisle has," responded Carrie. "She is bright, and good, and beautiful; and her husband added wealth when he died. She has a hundred thousand in her own right, free of incumbrances. But do not mention it. She does not like to have it known."

Strive as he would, Hugh Duchesne found himself unable to control his real emotions. He was barely courteous to Lisle, and quite attentive to Carrie. Yet Carrie was not deceived.

One night she went to her room, and threw herself on the bed, in a passion of tears.

"It is no use—no use!" she cried. "He loves her; but he is trying to hide it—

A Reduced Facsimile of Our Next Week's Cover.

"My lost wife—will she ever return?"

A Dramatic Episode from "A Fatal Fascination," which will appear next week.

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trying—oh, my God! he is trying to love me! Such a useless effort for any man!"

While she wept there, Hugh Duchesne was in the shrubbery, with Lisle Gray's hands, for the first time, clasped in his. Lisle's face was lifted wonderingly, as she listened to his impassioned words.

"I am, perhaps, mad!" he said. "I have no right to love you—only I do. But I am tied, hand and foot, more hopelessly—more horribly bound than ever man was before. And now, to have this come upon me—this passion, so mighty, that it takes hold of nerve, and soul, and brain, and will not let me rest night or day. I could almost kill myself when I think of it! I have no right to talk to you like this—to talk at all—only that these few words save me from instant insanity. Looking at you here, in the moonlight, I knew my brain would go mad if I did not speak!"

Then he turned away, and left her.

Within, a woman near the open window had sat, and heard all. It was his mother. She smiled, and said to herself:

"It is time he knew."

Outside, another woman had heard also, and had crept off in the shadows of the shrubbery, like a wounded deer.

Mrs. Duchesne tapped at Hugh's door; but no answer came. She entered. He was lying prone upon a couch, the picture of despair.

"Hugh," she said tenderly, "I have a bit of news for you which may surprise you. I would far rather have Lisle Gray for my daughter than Carrie Hildreth. Do not fear my displeasure!"

He turned and looked at her.

"Then you must have discovered that she, too, has money," he said, with a touch of scorn in his voice.

"Well, yes, she has money," answered his mother coolly; "and you love her. She will be an honour to us all, and keep up the reputation for good taste in family beauty, which the Duchesnes have always had. I hope you will not delay long. End Carrie's suspense—and make Lisle happy!"

"God help me!" he cried.

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing. Only that I would bless the hand that would put a bullet through my brain!" he said, and rushed out of the room.

For a week Hugh looked like an insane man. He ate nothing, slept little, and was as pale as death.

The ladies pitied him, and petted him; and Lisle lost flesh and bloom. She loved him with all her heart; and the mystery of his words and behaviour frightened her.

At night she sat by her window, and heard the thud of his horse's hoofs, as he rode off into the darkness alone. He would ride half the night, till his weary horse could no longer keep pace with his mad thoughts; and he would come home, to toss the remainder of the night in wild dreams.

Ah, it was a wretched household there, at Duchesne Place. At last Mrs. Duchesne grew to believe that some madness had come upon her son.

One night they were all startled by the sudden appearance of the old gardener. He was pale and trembling, and could hardly gasp out his errand.

"Flossie is ill—dying," he said, "and she asks for the young master—for Mr. Hugh. Where is he?"

Hugh was summoned, and hastened away with the old gardener to the latter's little cottage, just outside the grounds.

"How strange!" said Mrs. Duchesne, "and yet not strange. Hugh was always so kind to her when she was a child. I have no doubt she feels that he can help her. Her childish faith in him was so great."

But the night went by, and Hugh did not return. Mrs. Duchesne could not sleep. In the grey dawn, Hugh came in, pale and haggard, looking years older.

"How is Flossie?" his mother asked.

"Dead!" he answered. "And I am going away for a few days. Make my excuses to the guests. Imperative business calls me."

Two days later he came back. With him came a woman, evidently a servant, and a child—a beautiful, laughing boy, a year and a half old.

Into the presence of his mother and his guests he bade them come.

"I have a confession to make before you all," he said. "I want you all to know me as I am—a poor, weak, miserable coward. You see this child. Well, it is mine—the child of my wife, who died two days ago. I married her secretly four years ago. I admired her pretty face; and was fond of her, as one is fond of a toy, and so I married her. But I dared not confess it to my mother. When I repented of the step, I rushed away, and I never knew of this child's existence, till the night before last, when its mother lay dying. Heavens! to think of all she suffered for me.

"And I killed her. She heard my mad words to another woman, a week ago, and they killed her. She felt that she was in the way of my happiness, and she lay down and died, like a wounded lamb. And when she knew she was to die, she told me of our child, and asked me to care for it. And so I have brought it home, and you have heard the whole miserable story."

"Take the child out of my sight!" cried Mrs. Duchesne, turning fiercely upon the nurse.

"Mother!" cried Hugh.

But she silenced him.

"Do you think I will ever own it, or let it bear our name?" she cried. "The miserable, low-born child of a servant. Take it away, out of my sight!"

The nurse turned to go. But a hand detained her.

"Give the child to me," said a soft voice, and Lisle Gray put out her arms, and the child laughed and leapt into them.

"I am going away to-morrow," she said, turning with dignity to Mrs. Duchesne. "I will take the child with me."

"God bless you!" cried Hugh. "But do not go. Oh, if you will do *this* for my child—will you not *stay* for me?"

She looked into his face, before them all, the child still upon her breast.

"I will come back, if you want me," she said, smiling, "but only on condition that your mother will welcome me and this helpless little one. Otherwise you must come to me."

So Lisle went. But in due time Mrs. Duchesne thought of the mortgage on Duchesne Place, and, forgetting her wrath, sent for Mrs. Gray and the child. And even Mrs. Hildreth, when she read the marriage notice, sighed a sigh of relief.

"For, thank fortune," she said, "Lisle can't spoil more of my plans."

But as for Carrie—ah, well, she hid her hurt, as only proud women can. The bravery of a strong man is great, but the bravery of some proud women is greater.

Edward Wallbrook.

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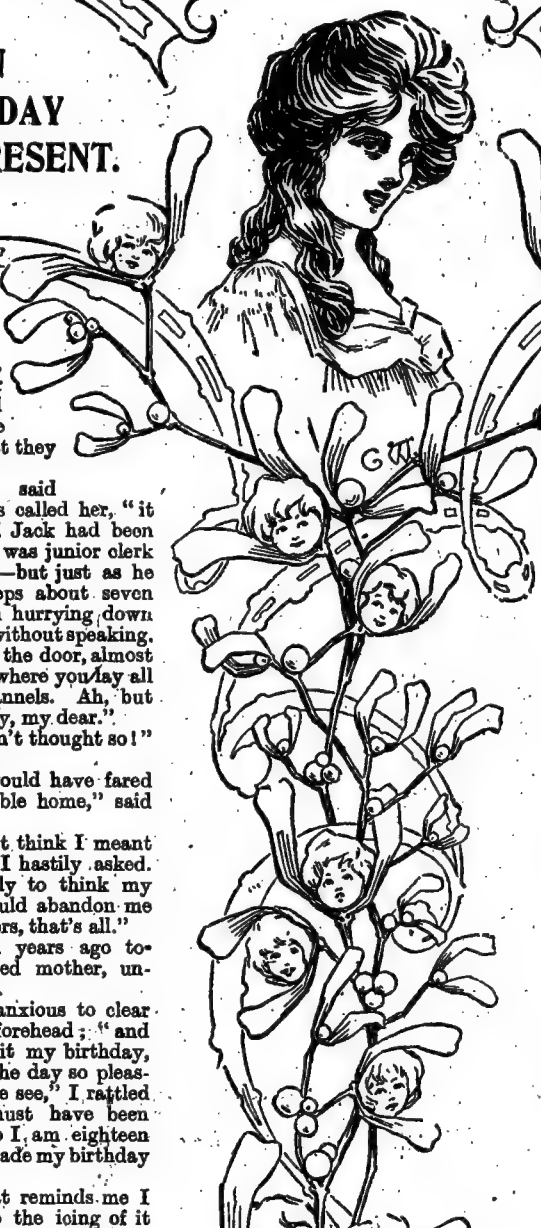
A HUMAN BIRTHDAY PRESENT.

The Tale of a Girl who Loved and Doubted.



MRS. RAYNOR, Jack, and I, were sitting in our little sitting-room, and for the hundredth time they were telling me what they knew of my life.

"You see, Birdie," said mother, as I had always called her, "it was a stormy night and Jack had been detained at business—he was junior clerk at Cotton & Co.'s then—but just as he was running up the steps about seven o'clock he met a woman hurrying down them. She brushed by without speaking, and he, when he reached the door, almost stumbled over a basket where you lay all snuggled up in warm flannels. Ah, but you were a very nice baby, my dear."

"Pity my mother hadn't thought so!" I sarcastically observed.

"Undoubtedly you would have fared better than in our humble home," said Jack grimly.

"Why, Jack, you don't think I meant that, do you, dear?" I hastily asked. "It made me feel badly to think my own flesh and blood would abandon me and trust me with strangers, that's all."

"That was seventeen years ago to-morrow night," meditated mother, unheeding our conversation.

"Yes," I chimed in, anxious to clear the cloud from Jack's forehead; "and you have always called it my birthday, and have always made the day so pleasant for me, too. Let me see," I rattled on, "you thought I must have been about a year old, and so I am eighteen to-morrow. Have you made my birthday cake, yet, mother?"

"Yes, indeed, and that reminds me I must go out and see to the icing of it to-night. No, you stay here. Hold her, Jack, for she's not to see the cake until to-morrow."

I retreated before her laughing command, and seeing how sour Jack still looked, I determined to do my best to make him behave like his own old self again. Perching myself on the arm of his chair I leant over, trying to catch his eye.

"Cross, dear?" I asked, very sweetly.

"No," he replied in a tone that said, "Yes, decidedly so; let me alone."

But I was not to be rebuffed. Slipping my arms round his neck I drew his face round towards mine.

"You're sorry you didn't send me to the Foundlings' Home, aren't you? It's enough to make anyone cross to think how he has been troubled for seventeen years just because he was so soft-hearted over a miserable little baby whose own people didn't care about keeping it. Are you sorry, Jack?"

"Are you, Birdie?"

He suddenly straightened up, a look in his dark eyes I had never noticed there before.

"What have I to be sorry for?" I asked. "Was I not thrown into the hands of the dearest, kindest mother and brother a girl ever had?"

"Yes, dear—that is, we've always meant kindness; but still I am not your brother."

"I know it, but I love you just as well," I began, but somehow under the steady look of Jack's beautiful eyes I could not go on with my usual protestations of affection, as I had always been in the habit of doing, and I drew my arm away from about his neck.

"But I don't want you to, Birdie," he said slowly; and then he went on eagerly, "my darling, I want you to love me just as well as I do you. I want you for my very own, for my wife, Birdie."

Clasping me close in his strong arms he told me how happy I could make him by saying that I loved him. And so strongly did he argue his case that some way I was completely won over to his way of thinking, and before the birthday cake was iced Jack and I were engaged.

"I've accepted Jack as a birthday gift," I whispered to mother as I ran out.

A radiant look of surprised joy fairly illumined her dear old face as she comprehended the meaning of my remark.

"It has been the wish of my life," she whispered, kissing me softly. "Be ready for other birthday gifts to-morrow," she called after me.

"Oh, happy birthday!" I whispered when to-morrow dawned, and I, awaking,

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remembered my promise to Jack. "What better gift could I have asked than the gift of dear Jack's love?"

Several little tokens were at my breakfast plate; some very expensive, too, for, since Jack's pictures had begun to sell so well and orders poured in faster than he could execute them, he had begun to be quite extravagant.

He had gratified an oft-expressed wish of mine by having a little cameo earring, found in the basket in which they first found me, set in a ring for me for one of my birthday presents. It was an exquisite, clear-cut cameo, and it had a decidedly unique setting; so I had always indulged in the hope that some time, perhaps, I might learn through it who my parents were.

It had evidently dropped into the basket by mistake, for there was nothing else about me to identify me. There were none of the proverbial strawberry marks or moles so often found on lost children in stories, so I had only the cameo to connect me with the unknown past.

So I slipped it on my finger and when Jack told me to keep it for an engagement ring until he could procure another it became doubly dear to me.

By-and-by, as soon as breakfast was finished, much to my surprise and disappointment, my lover went up to his studio and remained invisible for two hours.

"He might have spent my birthday with me, anyhow," I pouted as I plodded upstairs feeling "blue" enough.

I knocked at the door of his studio.

"Not just now, dear; I'm busy," came in Jack's voice from beyond the door.

Angry and indignant, for he had allowed me to spend my mornings there for two months past, I silently went to my own room.

I was angrier still when ten minutes later his door opened to admit Miles Griffith, a fellow from the Artists' Club. Then I was ready to cry with vexation. They had always petted and spoilt me, mother and Jack, and let me have my own way, so that I could not bear even this little neglect gracefully.

Besides, we were just engaged, and Jack, it seemed to me, wasn't acting just as he ought to under the circumstances.

At last I was determined to be mean enough to listen and hear if I could what they were talking about so earnestly in the studio.

Me, I found out at once, for Jack had just spoken my name as I guiltily put my ear to the keyhole. A disgraceful thing to do, I admit, but as I mean this to be a faithful account of my birthday, and as I really did listen at the keyhole, I record it.

"I have made a great mistake," said Jack, sighing heavily.

I couldn't distinguish Mr. Griffith's reply, but, hushing my breath, heard Jack say:

"It has always been my mother's wish. I did it more to please her, I suppose. She loves Birdie dearly, and——"

With a dry sob I fell forward on the rug. I could not have stirred then had they opened the door and seen me there.

"He has found out already that he has made a mistake, has he?" I thought bitterly, when my brain stopped whirling so I could think. It was only to please his mother that he asked me to become his wife. And to think he should reveal his disappointment to that horrid old Griffith first! Oh, it was too humiliating!

I resolved to release him at once, but again I listened, having a dim hope, I suppose, that perhaps my ears had deceived me.

"It suits my mother——" began Jack.

"That's not the thing," interrupted Griffith. "You never would be suited. She lacks expression and——"

"Yes, I know—naturalness; I know the faults—for I'm better acquainted with Birdie than you are, Griffith."

"To be sure," assented Griffith. "Mouth too large; eyes very vacant, I've noticed. I advise you to give it up."

"I'll take your advice," exclaimed Jack emphatically.

Then I rushed to my room.

So through Griffith's advice, which Jack seemed so ready to take, my brief little romance was to be shattered. Well, I would never stay and let him see my heart break, too; for I felt sure I never could live through this trouble, so dear had Jack in the *rôle* of lover become to me in a few short hours.

So, somehow—now it all seems like a vague dream to me—I found myself a few hours later wandering aimlessly down a strange street, not knowing or caring where my steps tended. Some workmen obstructed the pavement and I was obliged to cross the street. I remember stepping down and advancing a few steps, of hearing hoarse shouts of warning, feeling a sudden shock, and then all was blank.

When I returned to consciousness I was in a strange room; everything was strange to me.

"Where am I?" I asked, although I could see no one. "What has happened?"

"You are with friends," said a low, soft voice near me.

Turning my eyes they fell on a sweet-faced lady, not yet old, although her hair was nearly white, sitting near me.

"How came I here?" I demanded in a weak, startled voice.

After a brief consultation with a woman, evidently the nurse, the lady decided to explain the situation.

"You are weak, but I trust to your good sense to remain calm while I tell you why you are here. About a month ago you were crossing the street and my husband I and accidently ran against and severely injured you. There was nothing about you to identify you, so we brought you home."

"And this was a month ago. Has no one been here? Did you advertise?"

"No," replied the lady. "It was reported in the papers, I believe, though there was not very much about it, but I never thought of advertising for your friends. I supposed they would go to the station, and then be directed here, if you had any in the city."

"I have none," I said bitterly. "I was only a foundling, living upon charity all my life."

I was reckless. I did not think how unnecessary it was to speak of my own history to a stranger. A whole month I had lain there and no one had called. And my pale, thin hands showed how near to death's door I had been.

As I lay looking at my wasted fingers I noticed that my ring was gone. Hastily I inquired where it was.

My new-found acquaintance blushed, and then said:

"Will you allow my husband to talk with you a few moments? He has your cameo."

In a few moments a tall, handsome gentleman accompanied her into the room.

"Years ago," he began, after apologising for being the cause of my illness, and congratulating me on my recovery, "I had a pair of cameos carved in this city. They were unlike anything ever seen here. I had them set in a pair of earrings for my wife. One night our house was robbed by a trusted servant; the cameos were taken with other valuables."

"Was anything else taken?" I asked, sitting upright, forgetting for the moment my weak state.

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The gentleman strove to control his emotion, but his wife was silently weeping near the window.

"Yes, our only child," he replied brokenly. "Now, will you tell me how you came by this cameo, for it is the same I to-day took it to the person who carved it for me so long ago and he recognised it at once, although it has been reset."

"Was it seventeen years ago that your child was stolen?" I asked eagerly.

"Yes. What do you know of it?" he questioned hoarsely.

"I know that I am your child!"

After I had told the story so often repeated to me by Mrs. Raynor they were perfectly satisfied that I belonged to them, and their joy beggars description.

Their story was that my father had given his wife a necklace of diamonds, and seeing how pleased her baby was with it she had shaken the stones before its eyes, and at last, in a spirit of fun, clasped it about the child's neck. But she did not understand the fastening, and as her husband was away from home and she could not get the short chain over the child's head, she was obliged to let the nurse put the infant to sleep with the glittering ornament about its neck. But the temptation proved too great for the nurse, so she had taken baby quietly out to a neighbouring jeweller's and had the necklace unfastened.

The theory we, my new-found parents and I, formed was, that becoming frightened at her own exploit, and not daring to try to replace the baby—I never can realise that that baby was myself—lest she be discovered, she concluded to abandon it entirely.

"Now, where do these people live who have cared so kindly for you? I must see them," said my mother.

Reluctantly I gave the address. Jack came straight to me after my mother told her errand, and he looked so old and worn and haggard that for a moment I was lost in pity for him.

Then I remembered the indelicate remarks he had made to Miles Griffith, and in trying to be frigidly cool I only succeeded in crying weakly,

"Oh, Jack, Jack!" I sobbed, unable to be anything but my own impetuous self; "why did you teach me to love you only to tire of me so soon?"

"Tire! How? What do you mean, dear?" he asked, taking my hands anxiously as if he feared I were not quite rational.

Then as I grew calmer I had to confess how I had descended to the contemptible business of eavesdropping and what I had heard.

"It was my birthday, Jack. Don't you remember you had Griffith up in the studio? And you told him you had made a great mistake in engaging yourself to me, and—and he advised you to give it up, and you said you'd follow his advice."

For three minutes Jack stared at me, and then he, with difficulty, repressing an inclination to laugh, said:

"My darling, how could you believe it? Now listen. As you know, my forte is landscapes. Well, I thought I'd make one more trial at portraits, so, while lately I have been entertaining you and mother so politely in the studio, I was slyly taking 'sittings.' You know your birthday, or the day we celebrate as yours, and mother's fall on the same day; so she had often expressed a wish to have your portrait painted, and thinking that you would like hers, I painted your counterfeits as best I could, and then before I showed them I sent for Griffith, the fairest critic in the club. He told me candidly that as a portrait painter I was a dead failure, and advised me to allow never the public to see my attempts. The criticisms you heard were of your picture, not you. Are you satisfied?"

"Perfectly," I answered, feeling as if now I could get well and strong at once. "But my poor birthday was all spoilt," I sighed.

"To-day is your birthday, my dear," interrupted my new mother brightly, entering the room with Mrs. Raynor, "and if the other was spoilt ask what you will and you may have it."

"I'll take Jack," I said gaily.

And so I did, "for better or for worse," a year from my eighteenth birthday

Muriel Greaves.

Your Editor Chats.

I GATHER that the new series, "Decoyed!" is very popular with my readers. At any rate, I am led to believe this by the unanimous verdict of all those who have written to me concerning it. I feel sure that as the revelations continue the interest aroused in them will become greater and greater. Our serial, "Dupes of Destiny," too, is fairly in the running as one of the best we have ever published, and just at the present time the story is at a very absorbing stage.

ON page 107 appears a reduced facsimile of the picture in colours that will appear on the cover of next week's *Short Stories*. Our striking cover pictures every week bring fresh readers to this paper, and I have been the recipient of many congratulations on account of them. The story which will contain the incident depicted on next week's cover will be entitled "A Fatal Fascination," and will be written by Mr. Walter J. Mowbray, whose name is familiar to you all. This tale will be a splendid one, and you will miss a treat if you do not read it.

LET me say one word in advance about our Valentine Number. This special number will take the place of the ordinary issue of February 13th, and will be an exceptionally brilliant one. It will be full of valentine stories and illustrations, and the cover picture will be a seasonable one. Three weeks from now it will be ready; next week I will tell you something more about it.

IN our Christmas Number the fifth problem appeared. "The Duty of Roger Forbes" explained how that gentleman, intending to marry on a small allowance, was suddenly confronted with the hindrance, owing to the misdemeanour of his father, of being morally bound to support his mother and invalid sister. What had he better do? Marry or not marry? This question was, in my opinion, most satisfactorily answered by Mr. Thomas Pine, 19, Cardigan Road, Kingston, Portsmouth. I have much pleasure, therefore, in awarding that gentleman the guinea I offered.

I am busily now deciding the winners in the Statue and Running Riddles Competitions, announced in the Christmas Number. As soon as I possibly can I will award the prizes.

Before I close my chat to you, I wish to make a few remarks on a subject which will interest all of you, whether you are men or women, young or old, poor or wealthy, a celebrity or otherwise. I have in store for you a very great surprise, and, I may also say, quite an unexpected surprise in every way. It is not yet time, however, for me to divulge much, but I have spoken this little foreword of advice so that you may be on the look-out for announcements of this novel scheme I have in view in forthcoming numbers of *Short Stories*. For your own sake, take my hint and keep your eyes open for further particulars of what will be an immense advantage to everyone concerned. It is a scheme that is quite novel, totally dissimilar to any idea ever published.

Your Editor.

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Miss Britman's Last Lesson.

The Tale of a Lover who Returned.

"One, two, three, four! One, two, three, four!"

It was dreary and monotonous enough sitting all day in that cheerless room beside the tuneless piano, giving lessons to dull children, and Margaret Britman heaved a sigh of relief after the last pupil departed.

After sitting still for a few minutes, just to realise that her work for the day was over, she stood up, closed the piano, put away the ragged music, and busied herself tidying the room. It was little anyone could do to make the gloomy apartment bright or cheery, but what little lay in her power Miss Britman did before the coming home of Dot.

The round table was pulled in front of the fire, and the frugal tea set out, with a good deal of show and very little substance. Miss Britman knew how to make the most of the solitary muffin Dot enjoyed so, and the tiny pot of ham and chicken paste stood like an island in an ocean of china plate. The majolica teapot was hidden under a crewel cosy, embroidered in the highest of art patterns; the spoons and forks were silver in the last stage of attenuation, and the cloth, though white and fine, was darned out of all identity of the original pattern.

The few bright little water-colours on the walls only made the darkness of the drab paper more visible, and no arrangement of the scanty furniture could disguise the fact that the walls were hopelessly crooked; still, in spite of disadvantages, there was something about the little room that struck one on first entering. Perhaps it was the air of refinement struggling with the aggressive poverty; perhaps it was the pale, patient face of Margaret Britman, with its frame of prematurely grey hair and meek, sorrowful eyes.

Very slowly she moved about, for she was weary, and her thoughts were heavy, for she was anxious about Dot. She had been out as a daily governess for a whole year, but her salary was small and her wants seemed to increase out of all proportion to her earnings. Boots and gloves wore out, hats and gowns got shabby in a frightfully short time; and Miss Britman felt that she could not relax a single effort, or spare herself a single monotonous lesson, for Dot's wants had to be supplied somehow.

Just at five o'clock she came in.

"Take off your things, dear, and have some hot tea. Here are your slippers, all nice and warm."

"Thanks, dearie. Oh, it is nice to get indoors, if you could only imagine what it's like outside, auntie. Streets three inches deep in liquid glue, fog thick enough to drive a nail in and hang your cloak on——"

"Dot!" Miss Britman interposed mildly.

"Fact, auntie. I was really bewildered at Regent Circus, and had to throw myself on the mercy of a policeman; then an obsequious young man followed me all down Oxford Street, and kept bobbing his umbrella against mine."

"Oh, my darling, that you should have to endure such things!" Miss Britman cried, and her slender white fingers were interlocked nervously. "Oh, that I could spare you this, Dorothy."

"Never mind, auntie dear; it doesn't worry me in the least. Besides, I think—but wait a minute till I put away the tea-things and turn down the gas." And having done so, Dot sat down on the rug and laid her head on her aunt's lap. "I've got something to tell you, auntie."

"Yes, darling," Miss Britman said, after waiting a few minutes, for Dot was in no great hurry to begin.

"Aunt Margaret, did it never strike you that some day or other I might have a lover?" she said slowly.

"Dorothy! Dorothy! I never thought of that!" Miss Britman cried. "Darling, I can't give you to anyone; you are all I have in the world."

"Let me tell you all about it first, auntie," Dot said gravely. "It came about in the simplest way—so simple that I scarcely know how or when it began. It seems as if Mr. Ferris always came into the schoolroom, but I never thought much about it till to-day, when he looked at me so strangely, and held my hand ever such a time; then he said, 'Miss Derwent, I want to have a little serious conversation with you. May I call on you at home?' Of course, I said I should be very pleased, only I was never there in the daytime. 'Then may I call in your absence,' he said, 'and speak to your father?' I told him I had no one but you, auntie, and he seemed surprised for a moment; then he said he'd call on you to-morrow. I suppose he wants to ask your permission to marry me. What else can he want, auntie?"

"What, indeed!" Miss Britman said, a little absently. "Tell me a little about this Mr. Ferris, darling."

"There's not much to tell, auntie. He's Mrs. Carnforth's brother, and has been in India ever so long—twenty years, I believe. He's very rich and very kind, and—that's all, auntie. Just think of my marrying a rich man," Dot continued reflectively, "and having servants, carriages, lovely dresses—everything! It seems just like a fairy-tale!"

"But, Dot," Miss Britman said, after a long silence, "my dear little one, do you love this Mr. Ferris?"

"Love him, auntie? I don't know! I haven't thought much about that yet; but if he's nice and kind and rich, don't you think we might be very happy? I do so want you to have lots of pretty things—soft, dull satin, a sealskin mantle, real lace! Oh, dear! It would be nice. You'd look so sweet in a sealskin coat, auntie!"

Miss Britman sighed gently. The time had long gone by when dress had any charms for her, if, indeed, it ever had, and Dot's visions only made her more sad.

Clearly the child was slipping away from her. For eighteen years she had cherished her, and now the first person who passed by and saw her fresh, fair, young beauty, might bear her away. It was all just and natural—palpably and practically for Dot's good—still, it was bitterly hard; and Miss Britman sat by the dying fire thinking it all over, and weeping in her unobtrusive way, long after the child had laid her sunny head on her pillow and fallen asleep.

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Far away into the past Miss Britman's thoughts wandered to a hushed and darkened chamber, where she bent down to catch the last faint, fluttering accents of one who was lingering on the threshold of eternity.

"My child, Maggie—my poor baby—my almost as helpless husband—you will not forsake them? Promise me, Maggie, that you will take care of them?"

And Margaret Britman kissed her dying sister's face and promised. All the remembrance of the dreary, dreadful days that followed rushed upon her—Dot, a helpless infant, her father, stricken with blindness, both depending on Maggie.

Then in the midst of it all came a still greater trial.

The gentleman Margaret was engaged to was offered a lucrative appointment in India, and he wished her to go with him. They had been engaged for three years, and now there was nothing further to wait for.

Here was a divided duty. Margaret loved the man she had promised to marry, but how could she forsake the helpless baby, and its equally helpless father? How could she keep her promise to her dead sister if she went to India?

Her lover left her in anger.

"A divided love such as hers was not worth having," he said.

"But they are so helpless," she pleaded, "only let me stay with them a little while."

"You may stay with them for ever for me," was the angry reply, and the next day came a little packet of letters and a lock of golden hair, and Margaret Britman's romance was hidden out of sight for ever.

A few years, and Robert Derwent died, leaving nothing but difficulties behind him. Miss Britman took a lodging in a distant part of the city, and toiled for the child for long, weary years, late and early, through trials that would have overwhelmed a less resolute and devoted woman; she toiled on to give her niece a good education, and enable her to earn her own bread when she should be called away.

"Can you—will you forgive me?" asked Philip beseechingly.

And now, here was someone stepping in—Philip Ferris returned from India—Philip Ferris who had said farewell to her in anger eighteen years before—the one love and lover of her life was coming to see her next day to ask for the child—the motherless baby who had so unwittingly separated them eighteen years before. It certainly was passing strange.

The next day was grey and gloomy, fog overhead, damp underfoot, cold everywhere, but Dot was in high spirits, in spite of the atmosphere.

"I dare say Mr. Ferris will be shocked at seeing what a hideous house and street we live in, auntie. I can imagine him saying, 'What a distinctly dreadful place!' In truth, I sha'n't be sorry to leave Berry Street. Now, good-bye, dear. Be very gracious to Mr. Ferris; and, oh, auntie darling! I do hope you'll like him, because, you know, we've got to live with him, perhaps."

"Dot, my love, do you really think that you like this gentleman well enough to marry him? He's old enough to be your father."

"So he is, auntie dear; but that doesn't matter much if he's nice and kind and ever so rich—and he is."

Nice and kind, and ever so rich. That was Dot's idea of a husband, and her aunt felt sad and sorry, and in some way disappointed; she did not know where the child had got such ideas. And then came the awful thought of losing her, for she remembered what Mr. Ferris had said about a divided love. She would have but a small place in Dot's new home and new life.

Never did a day seem so long to Miss Britman. She had put on her best black dress in the morning, and taken a little extra care with the arrangement of her still abundant hair; that was all the external preparation she had made for the visit, but her heart throbbed wildly at every ring of the bell or step on the carpetless stairs. But the morning passed—three, four o'clock, and she breathed more freely; perhaps he wouldn't come that day, perhaps he wouldn't come at all.

So she went on more patiently with her pupil, a dull, tiresome child.

"One, two, three, four!" she repeated over and over again. She did not hear the step on the stairs, nor a gentle tap at the door, did not observe it open, and when she looked up Philip Ferris stood beside her. For a moment her brain reeled, and she had to hold on to the back of the chair to steady herself; then she held out her hand in welcome.

"You may go now, my dear, and I'll give you the remainder of your lesson to-morrow," she said gently, and the child wriggled off the stool and departed joyfully.

"Margaret!" That was all he said when they were alone, with one hand holding one of hers, and the other on her shoulder: "Margaret!"

"You have come to speak to me about—about Dorothy," she faltered, feeling all the colour forsake her face."

"No; I have come to speak about myself and you—to ask you to forgive me, if you can; to ask you to let me make atonement for my cruelty and folly; to ask you if it is too late for us to be happy even now. Dear, I only learnt yesterday how true and loyal you had been; I fancied I alone was faithful. Can you, will you forgive me, Margaret?"

"There is nothing to forgive, Philip."

"Then it is not too late. We may be happy still."

"But Dorothy?" Miss Britman said faintly.

"Dorothy knows. It was her resemblance to you that first attracted me. But the child must not come between us and our happiness a second time, and we will both take care of her. She will like me better as an uncle than as a husband."

"But, Philip, she thought——"

"Yes, dear, but now she understands. Margaret, you belong to me, and you must be obedient, so prepare to leave Berry Street to-morrow."

"But my pupils, Philip?"

"Dear, I will arrange all that. My brave, patient Maggie, you have given your last lesson."

Hal Smith.

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The Curious Case of a Man who Lost his Memory.

DID I imagine it, or was I awakened by a kiss, which fell upon my forehead with the gentleness of a snowflake?

There was an interval of several moments before I could open my eyes, and when I did so there was not a soul except myself in the room.

For some time I lay in a languid state, my brain too indolent even to trouble itself about the person who had kissed me—if it were a kiss. But at length I was aroused by the opening of a door, and a moment after a woman stood by my bedside, bending over me with a look of kind solicitude. She was young, and there was an indescribable charm about her presence. Yet, even in my indolent state, I realised that she was not handsome.

"You are better?" she said in a sweet, firm voice.

The hand which she placed upon my forehead as she spoke was firm in its touch also, and I instinctively realised that the owner possessed a resolute nature in spite of her gentleness.

"I—I have been very ill?" I inquired, in a voice which somehow sounded to me as strange and new as her own.

"You had a fall and were injured," she said, adding with an eager look which I did not then understand, "but I suppose you do not yet recall your adventure?"

"I do not remember," was my indifferent response.

"I would not try. It doesn't matter at all. Here is something you were to drink when you awoke to consciousness—if you did awake. Then you were to go to sleep directly."

With her strong, experienced arm my unknown friend raised my head to drink the cordial, which I accepted submissively. Afterwards I slept, I know not how long, and upon again awakening, my plain-faced, sweet-voiced nurse was still at my bedside. Her hand again rested upon my head while she spoke in a quiet, reassuring voice:

"The doctor says you'll soon be about again, you are so much better. He is here, and wishes to speak with you."

She paused, and a short, grey-bearded man, whose presence had not before been noticed, advanced, and I felt the power of his gaze upon me. I say power because he was unquestionably a man of great magnetic force, aside from his skill in medical practice.

"Dr. Barlow," said my nurse, and then, in her quiet way, she withdrew.

"You will be all right again in a few days, sir," were his first words, spoken with an assurance that quieted the slight flutter in my mind which threatened to confuse me.

"I am glad to hear you say so," I replied.

"You are aware that your illness was the result of an injury?" he continued, speaking in a careless tone.

I contracted my brows in a sudden spasm of thought. A strange, wild flood of questions rushed in upon my mind, and I believe the doctor's cool hand laid upon my head at that moment saved me from going mad.

"You cannot recall the event, so do not try," he quietly said.

I started up in bed, but he forced me to lie down again.

"You may get up and dress to-morrow," he added calmly.

"Tell me how it happened!" I exclaimed, the impulse to know the cause of my illness growing strong upon me.

"You were found upon the road and were picked up for dead. They brought you here and I attended you."

Again I started up in bed, and this time the doctor restrained me only partially. He regarded me with deep interest, but betrayed not the slightest sign of anxiety, although he must have been intensely anxious all the while. The flood of queries which, half incoherently, had already shaped themselves in my mind, now rushed to my lips.

"How came I in the road?" I demanded.

And before Dr. Barlow could have uttered a reply, had he tried to do so, I rapidly continued:

"And when was I found there? And whose house is this? And my pleasant-voiced nurse—who is she? Doctor, tell me—who am I?"

My brain was in a whirl as I uttered these queries, and I shivered as with the ague. But Dr. Barlow listened as impassively as though it all were the most commonplace matter in the world. His persistent calmness in a measure communicated itself to me, and his answers were given with such a reassuring voice and air that the shock to me was greatly lessened. There are few men who could have conveyed the truth to one in my excited state with such tact and gentleness.

"You met with your misfortune some three weeks ago," he said in his even tones. "This is my house, and the young nurse is my daughter. It is nothing so very unusual for a person, under some violent shock, either physical or mental, to lose for a time all recollection of past events, and even of one's own identity. You will recover in time. There was nothing upon your person to give us a clue to your name, but for the sake of convenience, since we must call you something, my daughter has called you Paul Conway. If you do not fancy the name, you may adopt any other, until your memory recalls the one to which you are entitled."

Somehow his candid statement of the situation, instead of exciting, calmed me. I lay back upon my pillow, and, overcome by the exertion, I soon fell asleep.

My physical recovery from that day was rapid. Within a week I was dressed and able to walk about my room; in another week I was strolling about the doctor's tasteful grounds, listening to the songs of birds, enjoying the luxury of the fresh verdure and June sunshine. Miss Barlow was with me frequently, and I was presently puzzled by a conviction that she watched my movements, studied my countenance, and even appeared to wish to keep me under constant surveillance. And yet she was otherwise so courteous, and in all ways so gentle and unselfish in her intentions, that as the weeks passed the sweet episode of love crept into the new life I was living. For as yet the past remained as a sealed book to me.

One day, as we were strolling down the garden path, I abruptly said to her:

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"I think I am quite well and strong now, and it is time for me to go to work at something." For it had more than once occurred to me that, with other things, I had forgotten the means of gaining a livelihood which I must once have possessed.

"Perhaps you do not need to work, if you could only remember who you are. Perhaps you are a man of wealth?" said Miss Barlow, with one of her smiles which always made her plain face so beautiful.

"It will do me little good if I am, since I do not know it," I replied.

"You must remain here until you recover your memory," she said, so decisively that I looked at her in surprise.

"You wish me to stay as a charity patient?"

"No, no. You will pay my father some time. You are under under his care, you know, and he is ambitious to effect a cure."

As she said this she laid one hand in an eager, earnest way upon my arm. I felt that, looking into my eyes as she did then, she could not fail to read my heart, and in impassioned words I essayed to tell her of the deep, pure love which I felt for her. But she checked me in a hurried, anxious manner.

"No, no!" she cried.

I could see that her face had grown deathly pale, and she glanced, involuntarily as it seemed, at a ring which I had more than once seen upon her finger. I was convinced then of what I had painfully suspected before—it was an engagement ring.

"You have an attachment already?" I exclaimed, unable to keep the pain of disappointment from showing itself in my face and voice.

"Do not ask me now," was her reply, with a glance that I could not understand, while it thrilled me strangely. "Wait until you are well," she continued falteringly, "and I will tell you all. How do I know that you are free to love me? You may have a wife already. Even you do not know."

She smiled again and hurried into the house, leaving me alone to ponder upon the strangeness of my situation. As I stood under the shadow of a high-growing hedge I heard the sound of voices upon the other side.

"All I want is a good look at him," said one in a subdued voice. "I can spot him easily enough. You say this invalid guest of the Barlows is of dark complexion, and not over tall?"

"That is his description," declared the other.

"And that he came here about ten weeks ago?"

"Yes."

"You have seen him strolling about the grounds, you say? And did you notice one hand—his left one, I believe?"

"It has a red scar across the back of it. Yes; I noticed that."

"Good! Then there remains scarce the shadow of a doubt but he is the man. But I must make haste slowly. We detectives have to keep our eyes open. It is possible the Barlow girl——"

He paused abruptly, and the two men walked away, leaving me to conjecture, with my mind in a tumult, their meaning. For a long time I remained there, thinking—thinking, and gazing at my left hand with the scar across the back of it. Oh, the missing link in my memory! I began to suspect that it contained a horrible episode that would unseat my reason if it were ever recalled.

I could not quite make up my mind to tell Alice Barlow that night of the conversation which I had overheard.

Retiring early to my room, I was overcome by a sense of drowsiness, and fell asleep in an easy chair. I was awakened by a hurried knocking at my door. Flinging it open, I was confronted by Alice, who seemed clad for a journey, while her countenance was the picture of womanly strength and resolution.

"Come, Mr. Conway," she said, in low, imperative voice. "My father is at the door with his carriage, and wishes us to go with him. Hasten, if you would spare me calamity!"

"Whither are we to go?" I asked, while I obediently donned a light overcoat and hat and followed her down the stairs.

"To the railway station," was her answer.

"And thence?"

"I do not know."

I was silent until we were all three in the carriage and speeding along the quiet road.

"I suppose this is an attempt to preserve me from falling into the hands of the detectives?" I then asked.

"Then you know?" the doctor quickly asked, looking intently into my face.

"I know, from something overheard, that I am under surveillance, but why I have not the remotest idea."

"Your memory is still silent, then?"

"Yes."

"Well, well, I cannot enlighten you, except that the officers are after a man of your description. They will arrest you if you stay here, and they refuse to accept even my assurance that you have no recollection of the past. Your only course is in flight."

"But it does not devolve upon you to become a partner in my misfortunes," I remonstrated.

"You are my patient, and I shall not allow anything to happen to deprive me of the glory of curing you, if I can help it," he decisively said.

Nothing would be gained by giving in detail the particulars of our rapid flight. Dr. Barlow had shrewdly bought tickets to to a point where he had no intention or making our destination, and here he obtained others for a secluded Continental town.

Of that journey I have now only a vague recollection, for before it had ended I was again ill, and very ill. The past weeks had been fraught with a constant struggle on my part to recall past events—a struggle the intensity of which even I did not realise. And now the discovery that I was wanted for a crime I was not able to withstand. For weeks I was ill with brain fever.

* * * * *

Again in languor and weakness I awoke to a sense of my surroundings. Again Alice Barlow, calm, gentle, faithful, attended my slightest wants. What passed in my thoughts during succeeding days and weeks would fill a volume if I were to write it out. We talked of many things in a light, placid vein. Dr. Barlow told me quaint stories, and we all laughed at them, but my strength came back very slowly.

One evening I fell into a half doze, from which I was awakened by someone coming softly into my room. I knew it was Alice, and did not open my eyes, until—softly as a snowflake again—a kiss fell upon my forehead. Then I looked up into the dearest of faces bending over me, and in a moment held one of her hands in mine—the one that wore the ring. Did I say she was plain looking? Ah, she was positively beautiful then!

"May I remove that, Alice?" I asked, touching the ring.

"No, no!" she quickly cried.

"Then you still love the one that placed it there?"

She was silent, but her face answered so plainly that it was strange that I could remain so calm.

"You promised to tell me about it some day," I persisted.

"When you were well," she answered.

As she spoke her eyes met mine, and for one lingering moment she gazed, and then this strong, placid young woman was sobbing joyfully in my arms.

For days the memory of my past life had been coming back to me, and I remembered the occurrence which had caused the paralysing shock to my brain, and ended in my becoming a fugitive from the authorities. I had an enemy who, in a moment of frenzy, attacked me, and partly in self-defence and partly by inadvertence, I had taken his life. There were no witnesses, but circumstances would have convicted me of a wilful crime. In my heart, and before God, I was blameless.

"And you believed me innocent from the first?" I asked, when I had told Alice all the details.

"Yes. But I should have clung to you the same had you been guilty."

For Alice and I were betrothed before the cloud came upon my memory.

It was I who gave her the ring.

H. Kennedy.

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Easily Explained.

HE: "I'm surprised that your father gave his consent." She: "Oh, he doesn't know you as well as I do."

A Difficult Query.

MR. B. (during the quarrel): "Well, if you want to know it, I married you for your money." Mrs. B.: "I wish I could tell as easily what I married you for."

Two at a Game.

HE (who prides himself on his bluntness): "I say, Miss Newton, let's get married." Miss Newton: "Oh, all right. I'm engaged to Mr. Goodwin. Who'll you marry?"

An Inducement to Marriage.

FRIEND: "You received a good many presents, didn't you?" Bride: "Yes, and just think how nice—most of them are from married friends, and we won't have to give them any in return."

Too Broad a Hint.

"HERE'S a story of a couple who married to win a bet," she said. "I'm not a betting man," he returned hastily. Soon after he took his leave, and he didn't really breathe freely until he was three streets away.

A Cooking Secret.

MR. ECONOMIE: "Did you write to that man who advertises to show people how to make puddings without milk, and have them richer?" Mrs. Economie: "Yes, and sent him a shilling." "What did he reply?" "Use cream."

A Proposed Change of Name.

SUITOR (to German governess): "Now, Miss Baum-wollerstein-er—Miss Woller-baum-erstein—confound it! Since I shall never be able to pronounce your name, will you put me out of my misery, and take mine—plain Jones?"

The Dear Friends.

MAUD: "If that young Spoonamore had been coming to see me as persistently as he's been coming to see you, I'd have made him declare himself long before this time." Irene: "Yes, dear. I presume that's the reason why he never went to see you."

A Young Bargain Hunter.

MR. DE FLIRTE: "So you've been hiding behind the screen, and have seen me kiss your sister, Tommy? Well, I've given you a shilling not to tell, you know." Tommy: "Yes, but I want two shillings. I saw you kiss my other sister when I was hiding behind the shrubs in the conservatory."

A Perversion of the Truth.

"YES," said Mrs. Catchem; "those are my daughters over there on the sofa. They have half a million between them." It was not until they were married to those daughters that the young men who overheard the remark found out that Mrs. Catchem referred to the rich old gentleman who sat on the sofa between the girls. Mrs. Catchem couldn't tell a fib, but she knew how to speak the truth advantageously

A Recipe to Avoid Marriage.

"How is it you have kept from marrying, being such a ladies' man?" Ned: "By never being in love with fewer than three girls at once."

A Matter of Comparison.

HE: "Are you happy now that you are married?" She: "Comparatively." He: "Compared with whom?" She: "Compared with my husband."

A Young Married Couple.

"WHY, Charles, if I didn't actually see you yawn just now." "Well, dearest, you know that we are now one, and I never can keep awake when I'm alone."

A Worse Danger.

SHE: "Because I cannot marry you, do not be disheartened. You must face the world bravely." He: "It isn't a question of the world—I've got to face my creditors."

Pointed.

HE: "See the ring round the moon?" She: "Yes." After a moment's silence: "George, can you tell me what is the difference between the moon and my finger?"

The Reason Why.

MRS. KINDLER (reflectively): "I wonder why a man never pays his wife any compliments after they are married?" Kindler (briskly): "He does better, my dear—he pays her bills."

That's So.

PAPA: "I think nineteen is altogether too early for a girl to marry. Don't you?" Mamma: "Well, yes; but I remember the time when I didn't, and I remember the time when you didn't."

She was Right.

MABEL: "Did you hear that Bessie Willis was married yesterday to Tom Errol?" Maud: "Really? I thought she would be the last person to marry him." Mabel: "Well, she was, wasn't she?"

A Red Letter Day.

SHE: "Do you remember, Frank, the night you proposed to me I hung my head and said nothing?" He: "Do I remember it? Well I should rather think I did. It was the last time I saw you act so."

At a Dance.

DANCER (wandering vaguely with lady in search of a vacancy for a couple in the lancers, addressing lady friend): "Are you made up?" "Well, really, Mr. Legley, your question is extremely personal!"

Hastened Footsteps.

"WHAT are you doing there, Jennie?" shouted her father. "I'm just saying good-night to George." "Well, as it takes you so long I will say it for you. Good-night, George." George went so quickly that he forgot to reply.

Just Like a Woman.

IDA: "Walter has broken the engagement between him and Della." May: "Well, I suppose she is still grateful for the boxes of chocolate he used to bring her every Sunday?" Ida: "Quite the contrary. She says he ruined her teeth."

Conceited Hubby!

SHE (after marriage): "You told me that I was your first love, but I have found a whole trunkful of letters from all sorts of girls, just bursting with tenderness." He: "I—I said you were the first I ever loved. I didn't say you were the only one who ever loved me."

Wanted Further Particulars.

MR. SAMPSON (passionately): "I love you devotedly, Miss Chumley, but my pecuniary affairs have prevented my making a declaration until now. But I have put enough away now to feel justified in asking you to become my wife." Miss Chumley (hesitating, but sweetly): "I confess that I am not wholly indifferent to you, but—but——" "But what, dear?" "Would you mind telling me how much you have put away?"

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AVENGED.

The Story of a Flirtation that was Repaid.

THE old clock in the wall rang out five melodious chimes as Cora Smith softly closed the kitchen door and ran to the little bedroom for her blue scarf.

"Five o'clock," she said, as the last stroke died away; "he is wondering why I don't come, and I must make haste. Madge, little Madge, are you coming with me to-night? I am all ready."

Little Madge, her twelve-year-old sister, came flying through the hall.

"Auntie wants you for a little while. Never mind if he does have to wait for you; you've waited for him many a time. Come quickly, and I will help you."

So sweet-tempered Cora Smith untied the blue scarf, and tripped away to her aunt as merrily as her little sister, albeit her heart beat like an imprisoned bird's at the delay.

The west was all aflame with the autumn sunset ere the sisters closed the cottage door behind them, and ran down the garden path towards the stile, where *he* was waiting—in other words, where hazel-eyed, sweet-faced Cora Smith's lover was waiting for his lady love, as she had many a night waited for him.

Almost every evening they met there at the stile—their "trysting place," he said, just half way between her home and the house where he was lodging. He had proposed it, and she was nothing loth to accede—it was so pretty and romantic.

Then Auntie Smith was not at all pleased with this dark-eyed young stranger, and, though she had not forbidden him the house, both lovers knew she preferred "his room to his company." And so, always with dear little Madge at her side, she daily tripped down the path through the leafy woods to the halfway trysting place where she met her handsome, dark-eyed lover, Neil Rowan. How her heart fluttered to-night as she thought of him, and the warm lovelight deepened and darkened the soft brown eyes!

"Neil, Neil," she said, almost unconsciously, aloud; and little Madge clasped her sister's hand closer, and looked up in her face.

"Do you love him so very much, sister Cora?"

A swift, hot colour came into the girl's cheeks, and then she paused suddenly, holding the hands of little Madge in a fervent grasp.

"Love him! love him, Madge! better than all the world—better than my youth, my life—aye, sometimes I fear better than my hope of Heaven! And I am to be his wife, little Madge, this good man's wife, when the beautiful Spring comes I shall leave you and auntie and uncle to be all his. But this is our secret, little sister, and only you can share it."

And then her hands relaxed their hold, and drawing the light scarf over her shoulders, she tripped silently on. They were almost there—nearing the edge of the wood, and the stile was but a step away. Another step forward, and there Madge held her sister back.

"Wait!" she whispered; "I can see two men on the seat, Cora. We do not want to meet strangers there."

"No, no," she replied, drawing back in the shadow of the wood; "it is Neil's friend, Willis Dean. We will wait until he goes, for I do not like to meet him."

Even as she spoke the figure rose, and the sound of his voice came on the twilight air, distinct and clear:

"And what of this love affair, Neil? When is it to end, and how? Are you really in earnest, and do you mean to marry the girl?"

Cora Smith's hand closed upon the arm of Madge till she shrank in pain while they waited for the answer.

Neil Rowan laughed softly.

"Marry her!" he repeated. "She is just the subject for a grand flirtation, and I assure you I have done the thing well. But for anything further—bah! I am going back to town to-morrow, and this is our last meeting; so be off, old fellow, for I expect her every moment."

Just for one moment Madge Smith's heart stood still in awful fear, for she thought Cora was dying. That white, ghastly face there in the twilight, that motionless figure, those tightly locked hands, it surely was not the fair, sweet maiden of a moment before. But the spasm passed, and without a word she rose and glided noiselessly away, and Madge followed her in silence.

Neil Rowan waited until the light had quite died out of the west, and the dew lay like summer rain on the grass at his feet. His cigar was smoked down to ashes, and he prepared to go.

"She isn't coming to-night," he said, mentally; "that is certain. The scheming auntie up yonder managed to prevent it this time. Oh, well, it saves a scene. I will drop a loving farewell note, and so it ends—a summer's amusement. Well, well!" and Neil Rowan strolled homeward, singing half unconsciously, "I won't have her, I know—I won't have her, I know—I don't care a straw who has her, I know."

The farewell note came to Cora Smith the following night;

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but the fever-bright eyes never rested on the creamy page, for ere the insane light gave place to reason again—death sealed the white eyelids. To such natures as this girl's, love is life; and the rude blow that woke her from the one bright dream of her youth snapped the slender cord that bound her frail spirit to earth, and out of the depths of her awful grief the kindly hand of Death led her to the mountain top, where is built the city of the New Jerusalem.

Day by day, week by week, month by month, so sped the time until eight years were counted. Eight times the grass had grown over the little grave in the lonely country graveyard, and again the October winds rustled the scarlet leaves over the narrow mound.

Wonderful changes had the eight years brought. Side by side with this grave were two others, and the headstones bore the names of good Aunt and Uncle Smith. They had rested there six years; and every summer beautiful Madge Smith came down from her town mansion, and lingered in the old home a week, trimming the grasses and planting bright flowers on the mounds. Bright, beautiful Madge Smith, the heiress of all Uncle Smith's hidden wealth, the wealth he guarded so well during that toil-worn, weary life.

Three years before Madge Smith had left school, to reign queen of Society. Beautiful, strangely beautiful, with that cold, white, high-bred face, those wide, fathomless, glittering, amber eyes, a figure matchless in symmetry and grace, accomplished, polished, and the heiress of great wealth, no wonder that lovers, old and young, knelt at Madge Smith's shrine. Strange wonder, the world said, that all were scorned—not gently and with words of pity and apology, but spurned from her very feet with scornful lips and blazing eyes.

Madge Smith was an enigma and mystery to all who knew her. No warmer friend, no brighter companion did those of her own sex seek for.

But never were those lips seen to smile, or those wonderful eyes to soften, in response to any lover's; no glacier was more frigid than she to all men.

All? Nay, Dame Rumour had plenty of gossip just now. Only a few weeks since a new arrival appeared on the scene of action.

Neil Rowan, merchant and millionaire, entered the list of Madge Smith's adorers—not for her wealth surely, Mrs. Grundy acknowledged graciously. He had enough of his own. It was genuine love that this handsome man of Society felt for beautiful Madge.

A wonderful change had come over the fair lady since his appearance. Bright before, she was brilliant now—sparkling, witty, bewildering; and the world looked on in amazement to see the flush stain her white cheek, and the bright smile that lighted her eyes at his approach.

And did he not recognise her, you are wondering? Nay, how should he? Sweet Cora Smith and the summer in the country were forgotten things with this man. He had broken half a dozen silly hearts since then, and left them all with Time, the great healer. He had flirted with Society's queens and village maidens innumerable, and left the past all behind him. And now he came and laid the first pure, real love of his lifetime at this woman's feet. So he told her one autumn night in the beautiful drawing-room of her stately home.

How her hands trembled and her eyes shone as she listened!

"Wait," she said; "I will give you my answer to-morrow night. It is my birthday, and I shall give an entertainment. You will come; I will answer you then. Be in the library at ten, and you shall hear my answer."

And the night came, and he was there waiting. He paced the room impatiently. Would she ever come, this girl that was dearer than his life? Yes, she *was* life to him.

"My beautiful queen!" he said softly. And just then he heard the light ripple of a woman's laugh in the adjoining room. *Her* laugh; he knew it among a thousand; and her voice. She was speaking loud and clear.

"There, Mr. Maesfield, you must excuse me for a minute. Mr. Rowan is waiting for me in the library. You know I am to give him his answer to-night."

And the other's voice, speaking tenderly, said:

"And I can guess that answer, little Madge. You are going to marry this man and leave us all."

She laughed softly.

"Marry him? No, indeed, sir! He is just the subject for a grand flirtation, and I assure you I have acted my part well. But for anything further—bah! Yet, he is expecting me, so by-bye till I come again," and she tripped lightly through the half-open door.

A white, ghastly, shivering figure stood by the library window.

"For Heaven's sake, Madge, tell me you were jesting!" he cried, as brilliantly, glowingly beautiful, she glided into the room.

"Not so, my friend," she answered lightly; "I spoke the truth. If you overheard my words I need not repeat them. It is my answer."

"But you gave me hope; you led me on; you have given me reason to think you loved me!" he cried passionately. "It is the one love of my life! I have centred every hope and thought on you, Madge, and for my sake, for God's sake, do not wreck my life!"

She was very pale now, and her eyes were black and glistening.

"Neil Rowan," she said slowly, "I have prayed for this hour for eight years; but never in my wildest dreams did I think my prayer would be so fully answered. When I saw the hue of death, the white agony, on my only sister's cheek—when I saw her writhe in speechless agony at the words she heard eight years ago to-night, I vowed to avenge her, God being my helper.

"Again, when I heard the thud of the earth upon her coffin, I vowed that vow. God has brought it about even sooner, more complete, than I thought. If I have given you one hour of such agony as she suffered I am content. If you could live and suffer it for countless ages I should be better content. My work is ended. Good night!"

Two hours afterwards the sharp report of a pistol rang with startling distinctness through the crowded drawing-room.

All present sprang to their feet except Madge Smith. Perhaps her cheek paled a little—I cannot tell; but the light of her eye never changed, her smiling lips never relaxed, as she gazed upon the blood-stained body in the library.

Neil Rowan had taken his own life, and Cora Smith was avenged.

Avenged—fully and adequately.

May Harvey.

HANDWRITING DENOTES YOUR CHARACTER.

And if you wish to learn what this is send a specimen of your handwriting, together with six penny stamps and a stamped addressed envelope, to Ranke, 23 Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. A reliable delineation of your character will be sent in return.

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SPLENDID NEW SERIAL. YOU CAN START TO-DAY.

Dupes of Destiny

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

By Blanche Eardley, Writer of "The Bond Between."

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY ARE:

SIR CYPRIAN RUST, who has inherited the baronetcy and estates of Sir Basil Wingate, though he is not the legal heir.

MARCELLA RUST, his daughter, a very lovely girl, who is greatly in love with

PHILIP NULLIUS, the curate of Crawley Village, where the home of Sir Cyprian, Wingate Court, is situated.

LADY VIOLET FRAYNE-LENNOX, whom Marcella believes to be her aunt. She is a very beautiful woman, and loves her niece dearly, but Sir Cyprian has, for some reason, immense power over her, which he uses to further his own ends.

EDWARD DAY is an orphan whom Lady Violet has befriended. He, however, in making unreturned love to Marcella, insults her, and Lady Violet refuses to have anything more to do with him.

CALEB J. JOHNSON, a City magnate and millionaire, who marries Lady Violet, though he knows that her husband is still alive. This husband,

MAJOR RICHARD FRAYNE-LENNOX, is a good-for-nothing, who has been turned out of the Army. Lady Violet believes him dead.

TWENTY-SECOND CHAPTER.

"Don't Send Me Back!"

"MARCELLA left the Court!" Lady Violet murmured. "*What* can it mean? What has sent her away?" Then turning to her new-made husband, she said quickly:

"Caleb, I cannot go away; I must stay and wait. I could not bear to be away from London when Marcella needs me, and I feel somehow"—her voice faltered slightly—"that she wants me badly!"

They returned to Grosvenor Place instead of going to Dover, as they had intended, and it was a strangely quiet bridal couple that sat in the brougham.

The financier was wondering as to his next move concerning his agitated bride. She had apparently forgotten that she had promised to love, honour, and obey him only a short time since; and Lady Violet was oblivious to everything and everyone except that something had happened to the girl she loved—that while she had been making preparations for her wedding with the "Gold King," Marcella had been driven to flight from the Court; and knowing what life could be made for any creature upon whom Sir Cyprian's hatred fell, Lady Violet shivered lest Marcella had incurred that bitter enmity of the man she called "father."

When she and Mr. Johnson were left alone by the curious servants, who knew that something unusual had stopped the honeymoon, Lady Violet turned to him impetuously:

"Forgive me for appearing neglectful, Caleb," she said, with a faint attempt at a smile, "but I cannot go away until I am sure of what has happened to Marcella."

"I understand," he replied soothingly, "but because the girl has had a tiff with her father, you must not imagine all sorts of wild things. Marcella is high-spirited, you know, and I daresay Sir Cyprian is not too easy-going himself."

She raised her brows. "What do you know of him? I thought you only met him for the first time here."

A slight flush stained the face of her bridegroom, and for a moment he hesitated, then before she could repeat her question, he answered quickly:

"I know of him, and am also a reader of character. I should say it was an unfortunate thing that Miss Marcella's mother did not live."

A spasm flitted across the pale, beautiful face of Sir Cyprian's sister-in-law.

"If Marcella's mother had lived, her life might have been very different. But now I am only anxious to know the worst. Marcella is not the type of girl to be hysterical because her father disagrees with her. I'm afraid—that—that——"

Before she could finish the words in her mouth, there was a violent ring at the hall-door that chased the colour from her face, leaving it a sickly sallow.

"It is Marcella," she said, clasping his hand tightly. "Please, Caleb, let me see her alone!"

As he left the room a tall, slight figure flew past him, and the next moment he heard the sound of two women's voices, one deep and tender, the other frightened and tearful.

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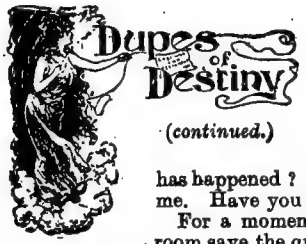

(continued.)

Lady Violet drew the girl to her with a passionate gesture. "Darling — oh, darling — tell me — what does this mean?" she said quickly. "Why have you run away from the Court like this? What has happened? For pity's sake, Marcella, tell me. Have you quarrelled with Sir Cyprian."

For a moment there was no sound in the room save the quick, uneven breathing of the two women; then Marcella raised her white face from Lady Violet's shoulder, and looked at her with a puzzled expression in her wide eyes—eyes so strangely like those of the woman whose arms were round her. But they looked hunted, as though they had last gazed upon an object of loathing and dread.

"Aunt Violet," she whispered hoarsely, "I can never go back to the Court again—let me stay with you. It would kill me to return."

Lady Violet's grasp tightened on the trembling girl's shoulders. Her face was deathly pale, and in her dress of dove-coloured *crêpe de chine*—which was a travelling dress as well as wedding garment—she presented a startling figure of daintiness, compared with the dishevelled appearance of the girl in her arms, whose tear-stained face and desperate eyes made her look haggard and worn.

"What has made you feel like this towards your home?" Lady Violet said slowly. "Has anything so dreadful happened, or is this only the result of a disagreement with your father? Have you discovered anything that makes life with Sir Cyprian impossible? Because, my darling girl," she went on pleadingly, "I am afraid, without some good reason, your conduct will be looked upon as childish and petulant."

"I have discovered nothing about my father," Marcella began slowly, and she did not notice that Lady Violet breathed a sigh almost of relief at her words, "but I have been insulted in my father's house by a man to whom I have already made plain that his attentions were odious, and instead of protecting me, my father only appeared to think that I was putting on a coquettish reserve, and he encouraged this hateful creature in his attentions. And," she went on passionately, "they both knew that I had promised to marry Philip Nullius."

Lady Violet started. "They, dear? Who, then, was the man that made you leave your father's roof?"

"Edward Day," Marcella said wearily. "I hate him!"

"Edward Day!" Lady Violet repeated. "Edward Day! Why, I did not know he had dared to annoy you again, let alone in your own home!"

Marcella opened her eyes. "Did you not receive the letter I wrote you, telling you that he was staying with us? I thought you so unkind, Aunt Violet, to have ignored my request to send for that hateful Edward Day, and make him cease annoying me."

The face of the older woman paled.

"I was not aware that the wretched young man had dared to thrust himself upon you at the Court," she said, in a low, ominous voice, "and no letter reached me from you, dear; only your telegram of the other day."

"I sent no telegram," said Marcella hastily; then the eyes of the two women met, and their faces blanched.

"Auntie—oh, I am afraid," Marcella breathed. "Why does my father insist on treating my wishes so callously? I would do anything on earth for him, if only he would not compel me to be with that hateful Edward Day."

"Edward Day!" Lady Violet exclaimed again. "How came he to be staying at the Court? I did not know of it."

"I told you in my letter," Marcella said. "You did not answer it, and I thought you had forgotten me in the preparations for your wedding with Mr. Johnson. Oh, Aunt Violet!" she said bitterly, "I was almost jealous of him when father told me about your engagement. It was wrong. I know, but I had loved to think of you only as my own property."

"So I am, dearest," the older woman replied passionately. "You come first with me always—whatever happens—always remember that, Marcella. I only live for your happiness, child, and separation from you is agony to me." She threw a hasty glance at the closed door. "Mr. Johnson is a sensible man—he will always be glad for me to have you near me, should it be impossible for you to return to the Court. I received no letters from you, darling; they must have been intercepted, and mine to you—but by whom and for what reason I cannot imagine."

"Edward Day must have known that I would write to you, Aunt Violet, and probably he stopped our letters. He knew, and so did father, that I had promised to——" She paused, and over the clear pallor of her skin, a rosy flush mantled.

"That you had promised to marry Mr. Nullius, the curate?" Lady Violet finished softly.

"How did you know?" Marcella cried in surprise. "Since you did not get my letters, who could have told you? Neither father nor Edward Day would accept what I said as being a serious truth—even Philip they seemed to laugh at, and when he went away so suddenly for his holiday, I can't help feeling that they had some secret up their sleeves, for one night I heard them laughing.

"It was when Dr. Slade left, and they were in the library after dinner. I was passing by the open door, when I heard Edward Day say: 'To the curate's pleasant holiday; may it prove as entertaining as he anticipates!'

"Then father laughed, and added: 'And as interesting as we have reason to believe it will be shortly.' So you see, Aunt Violet," she finished sadly, "something is happening that we cannot imagine; they are in league with each other against Philip and against me! Oh, it is a bitter thing for a daughter to say of her father—but I don't trust him, Aunt Violet. I am afraid of what lies in the future."

Lady Violet opened her mouth to speak, then closed it again. She was thinking about the conversation she had overheard in the train some days ago, and which she had allowed to slide into the recesses of her memory, owing to the subsequent events that had followed in its wake.

She reproached herself bitterly for having let her own affairs blot out the fact that Marcella's lover was in some danger. She had been selfish, and had only sought her own peace of mind, while the happiness of the girl clinging so tenderly to her was in jeopardy.

Every moment made it more desperate—more urgent the need for action. That Edward Day had linked his crooked interests with those of her brother-in-law, pointed too obviously to danger for Marcella and the man she loved.

But how could she stave off the evil without revealing to the girl the source from which she had obtained her information? To do that would be to betray more than was wise—more than she dared.

"Tell me what occurred at the Court that made you decide upon such an extreme step as running away, darling?" she said presently.

"It was this," Marcella replied, speaking in a low, hurried voice. "After dinner Edward Day followed me into the drawing room—and in spite of my having spoken to him of my engagement several times, dared to again make love to me. I repulsed him, and then he laughed, and said he had my father's consent, and that he intended to marry me. I tried to leave the room, but he stopped me—and then—and then——"

"Yes," Lady Violet breathed hoarsely. "What then? For Heaven's sake tell me, Marcella."

"He dared to kiss me!" the girl went on, with crimsoning cheeks, "and when I appealed to my father for protection when he entered the room, he only laughed and said that since I permitted the curate to kiss me, it was prudish to object to my cousin, who had asked his permission to pay his addresses to me.

"Oh, Aunt Violet, I don't know what I did," she cried

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passionately, "but I know I struck someone—Edward Day—and then I found myself in my room. I must have fainted. The first thought I had on regaining my senses was to come to you—to beg you to let me stay with you until Philip is able to marry me. I don't care how poor we are—I would willingly work myself rather than live at the Court."

Lady Violet's mouth had shut with a click while she had listened to Marcella's story, and her recital of the blackguardly conduct of the man who still presumed to masquerade as her nephew. She drew the girl to her with a protecting gesture.

"That man, Edward Day, is not my nephew, dearest. Acting in a moment of youthful enthusiasm, when returning from abroad years ago, I adopted the child of a dying woman among the third-class passengers. It was foolish of me to foist him upon my friends as a nephew. Most people knew that years before my half-sister had gone abroad, and they naturally concluded that Edward Day was her child.

"The morning he dared to insult you in my house, I informed him of his true position, and told him to leave my presence. That he should have presumed to follow you to the Court! I can hardly credit such impertinence. I will speak to Sir Cyprian about it. I am glad you came to me, darling. It was your father's telegram that stopped me, as Mr. Johnson and myself were going away!"

Marcella clung to her silently. "And I interfered with your honeymoon! What must you think of me for worrying you, Aunt Violet?"

Lady Violet bit her lips. In her heart she was glad that she had not gone away. She was not in love with the Gold King, but had allowed herself to be married to him through sheer lack of will to oppose him.

"Your—Sir Cyprian will be here soon," she said gently. "His telegram was sent from a station on the way up, so he has probably started."

"I don't want to see him," Marcella exclaimed. "I would rather never look into his face again, Lady Violet. I am afraid of him—there are strange things happening at the Court besides my own troubles! There is a mysterious woman in a locked corridor and the other day I saw a strange man—a man with a black beard——"

Lady Violet stopped the words on her mouth by placing her hand on it with a swift gesture. Her own face was the colour of chalk, only the vivid line of her scarlet mouth showing up the inky coils of hair, and the gleam in her brilliant eyes.

"Hush!" she whispered—and Marcella almost fancied that she heard her teeth chatter—"there is someone outside the door. I saw it moving a moment ago, and your voice carries so remarkably."

They moved apart and glanced silently at the door. Lady Violet was the first to pull herself together.

"It must be Mr. Johnson," she said with a faint smile. "I asked him to wait until I had seen you alone. He probably is tired of being out in the cold; I will open the door and let him in."

But before she could put her words into practice, the door was opened from the outside and a man came into the room. Marcella's eyes sought those of her aunt in a horror of apprehension; the man, smiling at them blandly, and stroking his silk hat with one white hand, was Sir Cyprian Rust!

TWENTY-THIRD CHAPTER.

Between Two Stools.

SIR CYPRIAN was the first to break the silence. He put his hat on a chair, unbuttoned his coat, then bowing towards his sister-in-law, said politely:

"Ah, my dear Violet! Charming as ever, I see! The interesting widow robed in her bridal gown of pearl-tinted hues. A most refreshing sight after a long, tiring journey. I wish my naughty little Marcella looked as dainty as her more mature, but equally beautiful, aunt."

Lady Violet looked at him contemptuously, but the hatred in her voice when she spoke was apparent only to the man.

"I do not for one moment suppose that you came here, and *waited outside my door*"—with dry emphasis—"for the express purpose of complimenting me upon my appearance, Cyprian. Such Arcadian simplicity would be most foreign to your nature."

Sir Cyprian smiled and rubbed his hands thoughtfully. "Smartness was always your most salient point, my dear Violet. You really excel in crispness of dialogue occasionally. But I will acquaint you and my silent little girl over there—who has not greeted her father with that loving abandon so precious to parents—with the real object of my inopportune visit. I have come to take back to the Court my runaway daughter. She has been very troublesome lately, and given me grave cause for anxiety, but I will say nothing about that—now."

Marcella, like one roused from a trance, turned to Lady Violet, and cried passionately:

"I, can't go back, Aunt Violet. Don't let me go—let me stay with you—I cannot go back—now!"

The arms of the older woman closed round the trembling figure tenderly, and over the girl's head her eyes met those smiling and apparently fathomless depths of Sir Cyprian.

"I wish you to grant me the favour of keeping Marcella with me," she said quietly. "She may return to the Court later on if you wish it, and she feels she could be happy; but just now, in her run-down state, I fear it may be the worst thing imaginable to force her into obedience. She is utterly unnerved, and has received some severe shock to her system."

"I am sorry to appear ungracious," he replied, a certain hard note stealing into his voice, "but it is my wish that Marcella accompanies me back to-night. You are right in saying she has nerves; I have been watching for some time the increased loss of self-control and restraint, and feel that it is my duty to watch over her, since she is my daughter."

Lady Violet flashed a passionate glance of hate at him, as she said:

"And you guard her by allowing her to be deliberately insulted by Edward Day in her own home. I turned him out of my house for his ill-bred manners, and told him the truth about his obscure parentage in the hope that it might teach him a lesson in humility."

"Edward Day asked my consent to speak to Marcella," Sir Cyprian said coldly. "I gave it, and she was to blame if he imagined that, being something of a coquette in her treatment of his sex, she was not serious in repulsing him. As to his parentage, surely you are wronging your half-sister in denouncing him?"

"I must tell you that you cannot get me to believe that you are ignorant of the fact that Marcella has promised to marry Mr. Nullius," she retorted, "and now that this young clergyman has *gone on a holiday* at your instigation, you try to undermine her strength of purpose by countenancing the attentions of another man.

"As to Edward Day being my dead half-sister's child, that is an idea brought about by people whom I have never troubled to contradict; in fact, he is the child of a miserable woman who came from Australia on the same liner as myself some years ago. She died, and in a spirit of charity I took the boy and brought him up as my nephew. But now I bitterly regret it, as I see that his unknown parents left him a heritage of vice and ill-principle. So you see that the creature you have forced upon your daughter, is in no way a fit associate for her."

While she had been speaking Sir Cyprian's face had flushed, then paled, but whether with anger or surprise Lady Violet could not decide. She knew that he had winced when she had mentioned the curate's holiday, but also that he had grown almost livid when he had learnt of the obscure origin of Edward Day.

"This is no doubt very interesting," he said, after a pause, "but it in no way influences me from insisting on my daughter returning with me to the Court. Remember, I have my answer ready, should you push me too far by your opposition.

"I might also discuss a few things with Marcella and your new husband, Mr. Caleb Johnson, that would interest them

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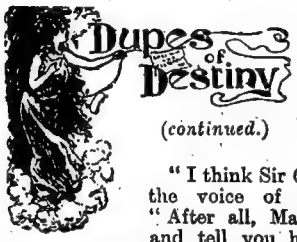

(*continued.*)

largely. You must choose now whether I take the extreme course, or you let Marcella return with me. She is utterly under your influence—it rests with you to counsel her rightly."

"I think Sir Cyprian is right, Violet," said the voice of the financier behind them. "After all, Marcella will be able to write and tell you how she is getting on; and, perhaps, when she is better, he may allow her to come and stay with us."

Lady Violet turned a haggard face towards Marcella, who had remained motionless during the conversation. "Until we may arrange something else, darling, perhaps you had better go," she whispered. "I will watch over you, and see that you get my letters.

"Don't fear, and, above all, keep brave and collected. Be careful, and don't do anything rash, or lose your temper in any way. I mean to find out a great deal, and you must not be impatient if I do not press Sir Cyprian. He is a dangerous man to thwart."

Marcella clutched her nervously. "Then I must return there where everything will remind me of past pleasures," she answered in a low voice. "Why did you not defy him to speak? He is cruel to threaten you like that."

A strained look stole into Lady Violet's face. "He has the whip hand, darling, at present. But now go back. There is nothing to fear since Edward Day begins his secretaryship with Mr. Johnson to-morrow, and perhaps when Mr. Nullius returns your—Sir Cyprian may be in a different mood."

Reluctantly Marcella obeyed. There seemed nothing else to be done, and she yielded with as good a grace as she could, under the circumstances. When she left the room with her aunt to have a little lunch, Sir Cyprian laughed slightly as he turned to Caleb J. Johnson, who had watched with inscrutable eyes the scene between his new-made bride and the baronet.

"Women are hysterical creatures," he said lightly. "I wonder at your putting your head in the noose, Mr. Johnson."

The financier laughed. "I fancy I shall not regret it," he answered drily. "You must have been very happy in your first marriage, Sir Cyprian, to withstand temptation a second time."

The Baronet started slightly. He was longing to ask Mr. Johnson what he had been doing with such a shady companion as the man with whom he had seen him in Piccadilly some days ago, but an intangible something held his tongue.

Caleb J. Johnson would be a difficult man to corner into an admission—and Sir Cyprian did not feel at home with him.

The cool, calculating eyes of the financier were like gimlets—they pierced him. But his voice was cool and even as he said lightly:

"I suppose you have many needy hangers-on to your charity now you are such a wealthy man, Mr. Johnson?"

The financier's lips parted in a strange smile. "'Needy,' yes, 'hangers-on' no. I am too busy to worry myself about failures, Sir Cyprian. I am only concerned with the successes."

"The man I saw you with in Piccadilly the other day did not strike me as being much of a success." Sir Cyprian laughed carelessly. "I thought him, in fact, the seediest-looking individual I have ever seen. He might have committed a crime; he looked so hang-dog."

The financier turned sharply and glanced intently at the fair, unconcerned face of the man opposite him. Something in the manner of his questioning warned him that it was no idle thought that had suggested it. What lay behind that smiling exterior? he wondered. Surely the man was not known by the baronet as his sister-in-law's first husband?

Aloud he said: "You are right, Sir Cyprian; he was rather a low-down sort of chap. I knew him in Australia when I was there years ago. He owed me money once—but now has paid it back in another way."

Sir Cyprian was silent. He did not dare to press the question further, lest he should appear too anxious. He longed to ask the name by which the financier had known the seedy-looking stranger.

As though divining his thoughts, Mr. Johnson said: "His name when I knew him was Dick Richards—probably not his own"—and he smiled grimly as the memory of the bloated, drink-sodden derelict of a crack cavalry regiment rose before his eyes.

"By the way," Sir Cyprian began suavely, "since we may almost call ourselves connections, Mr. Johnson, let me condole with your loss of the Mona Lisa. A very strange robbery, that only an unusual sort of thief could have thought of it. My daughter, Marcella, told me about it, and of your brilliant method of concealment. I thought it very clever at the time—and yet in spite of all that, it went shortly after. Sad pity!"

The financier's face clouded. "Thanks," he said curtly. "It certainly was a great mistake to let it go. But Scotland Yard has been following up a very slight but important clue, and I fancy we shall have the clever perpetrator of the robbery by the heels very soon."

There was a movement at the door. Lady Violet and Marcella stood on the threshold. Marcella looked more composed; Lady Violet had the look of one whom Time had touched heavily. Sir Cyprian turned as they entered. His eyes were shining, and the expression of his mouth was urbane and debonair.

"Ah, here you are at last!" he laughed, addressing Marcella, but keeping his eyes on Lady Violet. "You are just in time to hear Mr. Johnson tell us of the clue the police have found concerning the robbery of the Mona Lisa. They are on the track of the leader now, so Mr. Johnson says."

"I am so glad," Marcella breathed, clasping her hands and looking at the financier, who was now her aunt's husband. "I always felt somehow that I was to blame for that, Mr. Johnson. I brought bad luck to it."

Sir Cyprian laughed again. "It was bound to go whether you saw it or not, Marcella. But I am anxious to hear of the clue that Scotland Yard has got hold of. Is it anything to do with finger prints, Johnson?"

"No," the financier replied shortly. "It is something that was picked up behind one of the heaps of cushions and the side of the divan, over which the picture hung in the recess. It had lodged between one of the pieces of the woodwork, and might never have been noticed except for the lucky chance of moving the whole thing."

"Well, what was it?" There was a note of impatience in Sir Cyprian's voice. His interest was flattering to the financier. Only the pale, silent bride he had married that morning appeared to be as keen on the subject as himself. She was gazing with rapt eyes upon the man she had promised to love, honour, and obey, and in her eyes there lingered a look of fear and horror!

"It was a very rare coin!" the financier went on. "I am not a judge of them myself, but I know they are considered very valuable; and the police say that the man who planned the robbery, and who is, I think, a man they want badly, is identical with that notorious chief of burglars they know by the sobriquet of the 'Spade'—the coin they found was a spade guinea."

"A spade guinea!" cried Marcella. "Why—how strange, I——" A sudden crash drowned the words on her lips. A tall vase on a pedestal against which Sir Cyprian had stood, had swayed, then fallen into a hundred pieces on the ground.

"I must apologise for my clumsiness," he said in a tone of regretful dismay, turning to Lady Violet. "I can't imagine how it happened."

She returned his gaze steadily. His eyes were still smiling, but his underlip was not quite still. "I understand," she said coldly; "please don't apologise—it was an accident that was bound to happen."

When the carriage was at the door to take them back to the station, Lady Violet drew Marcella aside, and whispered:

(Continued on page 125.)

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She drew the girl into her arms and kissed her tenderly. Her heart ached to cry out to her brother-in-law: "Do your worst. Betray my secret to my husband—shame my motherhood before my child—and then let me keep her if I can"—but she knew that she would lose not only Marcella, but everything else, too; and a break from the girl now would mean needless agony and heart-wringing.

She could perhaps serve her better by hiding her secret in her own heart a little longer. So she had no other course open to her but to let the one creature she most loved on earth return to the shelter of a roof she feared and dreaded.

She sat by Marcella in the carriage, as she had insisted on seeing them off, and under the fur rug they held each other's hands tightly.

Sir Cyprian laughed and chatted gaily. He was solicitous and considerate to his sister-in-law—and tenderly soothing to his daughter. He patted her softly on her arm, and spoke about the lost roses on her cheeks with anxious care. But under his touch the girl shivered.

At the station they reserved a first-class compartment. As the train was getting up steam, Marcella put her head out of the window, and bent down to Lady Violet. "Find Philip," she whispered softly. "I want him—I love him." Lady Violet's eyes flashed with understanding.

She moved her lips, and they formed the word "Yes."

Standing behind his daughter in the carriage, Sir Cyprian caught that look on Lady Violet's face, and his mouth grew savage. The next moment it smiled.

The train snorted and the engine shrieked; they steamed out of the station slowly. Then Marcella fell back in her seat, wan-eyed and listless.

Sir Cyprian looked at her thoughtfully, then he rose from his corner at the further end of the carriage, and, leaning towards her, pulled her sharply by the wrist towards him.

"Sit here, where I can see your dutiful face," he snarled between his teeth. "I have something to say to you!"

TWENTY-FOURTH CHAPTER.

Johnson to the Rescue!

WHEN Lady Violet Johnson—to give her her new name—arrived at Grosvenor Place, she went straight to the drawing-room, where she knew she would find the financier, Caleb J. Johnson, waiting for her. The bridegroom was waiting to take his bride on a prolonged honeymoon. She shivered and drew her priceless furs closer. They were a present from her husband.

"Ah, here you are, Violet," he said briskly. "I hope there will be no more interruptions to our wedding-day plans. We have just time to catch the evening mail boat to Boulogne, unless we stay and dine first, and go on by the midnight boat."

She noticed that his tone was that of the lord and master already. She had become this man's chattel—the law had given him the right to compel her to do his bidding, and he showed the usual want of understanding concerning the delicate fabric of a woman's highly-strung organisation.

She recognised that the financier differed in no way from the rest of his sex. It was the brute instinct—the dominant sway of the male animal over the female.

She looked at him critically. His ugly face with its fascinating smile, repelled and attracted at the same time. She wondered whether she could surprise this man—throw him off his guard, and force him to own himself beaten.

She came forward slowly, looking at him with a half-thoughtful, half-playful smile.

"I am sorry the day's happenings have been a nuisance to you, Caleb, but I am afraid there is yet another disappointment for you. I cannot go to Calais to-night—or to-morrow night either."

He started and flashed a sudden glance at her. Had she learnt anything of the means by which he had won her?

"Why not?" he said aloud. "You are not the woman to play with me, Violet. Why have you decided to leave me to continue a lonely honeymoon? Remember, I am your husband!"

"I cannot go with you," she said steadily, "because I have promised Marcella to lose no time in searching for the man she loves. He has gone away, and she fears there is danger for him. I *know* there is danger for him. I wanted to ask you to help me find him—to restore him to her in safety. Then—then we would go away together if you like."

"So you put the love-affairs of a girl like Marcella before your duty to me," he said slowly. "It is absurd—impossible that I should allow such a thing. Let the young man alone—he is probably playing his own game somewhere, and Miss Marcella had better learn the lesson of patience while she is young. If I refuse to countenance such folly—what then?"

She shrugged her shapely shoulders. All her old spirit was returning under the lash of the man's anger; she was beginning to be herself.

"Nothing can move me from my resolution to do all I can to help Marcella," she replied coldly. "And if you fail me I must find someone else. But I swear that I shall be wife in name only to you, until I see the happiness of my niece assured, and not even then if you attempt to thwart me. Marcella is the only creature I love—nothing matters so long as I can bring some joy to her!"

Caleb J. Johnson was silent. He had never before had the tables turned upon him like this. That he should win the prize for which he had planned and intrigued, only to be cheated at the last moment, was a bitter humiliation—one he could hardly believe true, had not the woman who was his wife spoken them.

"Those are strange words, Violet, from a wife to her husband," he said coldly. "I am to be put on one side for the sake of a boy and girl love affair. You make terms and conditions with me as though I were a lackey. Am I to understand that you married me only for my money?"

Her lip curled. "As you married me for my position, or title and social status, please don't attempt that tone with me, Caleb, it is rather hackneyed."

He grasped her wrist savagely in his strong brown hand. "You say the truth. I did choose you for your beauty and capacity to bring the best people to my house; but now I would not care if you were a pauper with no Society friends. I love you, Violet; I love you as I never loved when a boy!" He drew her to him roughly. "Do you understand?" he said hoarsely. "I love you, Violet, and this is our wedding day!"

She shrank from his touch, as from contact with a fiery furnace. She had not guessed that such a calamity should befall her for the financier to love her in this half-savage way.

She had been prepared for a marriage of convenience, but this! She drew in her breath quickly. A solution out of the difficulty suggested itself to her mind.

She turned her face to him. His laboured breathing showed that he was still under the influence of his passion.

"Caleb," she said swiftly. "If you would grant me the great favour I have asked—if you will leave me here and find Philip Nullius, the curate whom Marcella loves—then, if you return successful, I may greet you not coldly, as an unwilling wife, but with love for you. Yes, Caleb," she finished with a flush on her cheeks, "if you bring him back alive and well I may love you."

He smiled grimly as he released her. "You may love me! That is the bait you hold out, is it? You women have wonderful ways in turning a man to your own purposes." He looked at her curiously. "Your love for Marcella stands between us, yet it may be the means of making you love me."

She put out her hand hesitatingly. "You will go—you will look for Philip Nullius, Caleb?"

He smiled. "Have I not a reward to win? And I am fool enough to want that reward, Violet, more than the success of my new prospectus even!" Then he became once more the business man with the old inscrutable eyes

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"Tell me how and where I am to begin looking for this young man? I suppose I shall find him enjoying himself in a rectory, and he will resent being found."

She shook her head. "No, no, Caleb; there is something behind his disappearance. I did not tell Marcella for fear of terrifying her, but I will tell you what I know."

Then briefly, and leaving out her reason for being in the train with the two men whom she had followed, she told him of the scraps of conversation she had overheard about Philip Nullius, and the address they had mentioned as being the place where he would be found.

He made a few hurried notes in his pocket book; "18 Lillie Road, Leyton," and "Water Grange," he murmured. The evidence of mystery in the case began to interest him. He was fond of unravelling other people's secrets. "What was the principal man—the man who seemed to be the leader in the business—like?" he said after a pause.

"He had a black beard and wore blue glasses. I could not see much of his face," she replied nervously.

"Had he anything distinctive about him?"

She shook her head. "Nothing." For many reasons she did not wish to discuss the man with the black beard. She only wanted Philip Nullius to be rescued from any danger. There might yet be time to help him without a public scandal.

"Why not get Sir Cyprian to do this?" the financier said suddenly.

She flashed a glance of horror at him. "He hates the curate," she said coldly, "and has other plans for Marcella."

"And you object to the police taking it in hand?"

She made an impatient gesture. "That would be to disclose much that is better concealed; whereas, if you go quietly and find him, you will do Marcella a great kindness, and prevent a very nasty scandal; besides"—she hesitated—"besides winning my everlasting gratitude."

He laughed shortly. "Ah, so it has dwindled from 'love' to 'gratitude' already, has it?" He took her hand in his, and gazed at her with a cynical smile. "There is certainly no fool like an old fool," he said.

He kissed her gently on her forehead. He was putting a great restraint upon himself in leaving her in so cavalier a fashion.

"Good-bye, Violet. This is a strange honeymoon, but I shall get some amusement out of it perhaps. You will stay here, I suppose. By the way, you have told me everything about this young man, haven't you?"

She nodded. "Yes, you know everything. Good-bye, and I shall pray that you don't get there too late."

As the financier left his bride's house a quiet figure darted from under a lamp-post and followed him swiftly. The Dovermarle Hotel was soon reached in a hansom, the silent figure seated on the back rail. Then a few moments later the financier stepped into the hansom again, giving an address to the driver that made the silent listener outside smile slowly.

"The Chief was right. His wire came just in time. It would have been awkward if this had been sprung upon us suddenly. Forewarned is forearmed."

When in a first-class carriage at Liverpool Street Station the financier took his forty minutes' nap, the shabby stranger was in a third-class compartment in the same train, still smiling with the air of a man who had done his duty.

It was near midnight when Mr. Johnson arrived at his destination, and his first thought was to put up at the Station Hotel at Leyton. His unknown companion in the meantime was walking with the steps of one not a stranger to the country, in the direction of the village.

TWENTY-FIFTH CHAPTER.

"Water Grange."

"Dear Sir,—*Hearing that you are staying in Leyton for a holiday, I am presuming on a mutual friendship with the Rev. James Cray, of London, to call upon you this evening. I am here for a few days, and would like to be of some service to you if I could. My old friend placed the facts of your romantic history in my possession, and I take a particular interest in a man who has, through sheer force of pluck and brain, worked himself from a foundling hospital into the Church. My friend, Sir Cyprian Rust, has given me your address. I am, faithfully yours,* Edwin Boulter."

Philip Nullius read the letter of his unknown correspondent, who wrote from a house called "Water Grange." The letter was that of a man of culture, yet there was something about it that made him wonder as to the personality of the writer.

It was now ten days since he had left the place where the lady of his dreams dwelt, and being in honour bound not to write to her, had kept his word to Sir Cyprian, who had impressed upon him that he trusted in his word.

His object in waiting so long was to see the friend of whom Sir Cyprian had spoken as being likely to help him to a living.

And now this letter had arrived—and the time of waiting had ended.

Punctually at seven the small maidservant knocked at the door. "Please, sir, a gentleman to see you," and immediately upon her words a man came into the room.

He was tall, of great muscular strength, and his face was of a dull reddish colour—unhealthy and vicious in expression. But it was his eyes that made Philip Nullius take a sudden deep dislike to him. They were of an ugly, greenish hazel, and the lids were innocent of lashes.

"This is a pleasant surprise, Mr. Nullius," said the stranger, in a hearty tone. "I am glad to look you up, and hope we shall be friends."

Philip bowed coldly; the stranger's pale eyes were watching him with curious intentness. They noted the brown colour of his strong young neck, the size grip of his big, capable hands. They were the hands of a man who did more than preach in a pulpit.

"You are Mr. Boulter, I suppose," Philip said quietly. "I am surprised that you should have gone to so much trouble to look me up."

Mr. Boulter flashed a look at him. "Not at all," he answered easily. "I told Sir Cyprian I should be down this way. My uncle, the Vicar of the next parish, has a charming place near here, 'Water Grange.' I am staying there, and came with an invitation from my uncle to ask you to accompany me back to supper."

Philip hesitated. He felt inclined to refuse the invitation, and afterwards he wished he had. But the longing to once again talk to his equals—to discuss those things that were dear to his heart, made him yield.

Besides it had been so very lonely in his rooms, and the thought that the uncle of this unprepossessing man was perhaps the clergyman who would help him to his heart's desire, filled him with a sense of elation.

"Thank you," he said simply. "I will come with pleasure."

A slow smile crept across Mr. Boulter's rather coarse mouth. "That's right!" he said heartily. "You will have a warm welcome."

Outside they stepped into a shabby old trap, driven by a man whose face it was too dark to see.

"Home, John!" cried Mr. Boulter, and Philip fancied that his imagination had played him a trick in thinking that the coachman had chuckled softly when he replied, "Home's the word, sir."

* * * * * *

The following morning a tall man with an ugly, unattractive face played a tattoo on the door of No. 3, Lillie Road.

"Is Mr. Nullius staying here?" he asked.

"No, sir," the woman answered, "a gentleman called for 'im last night, and they went away together. He left no address."

The man turned away.

"Gone, and left no address!" he muttered. "Then I am too late! He has been lured to 'Water Grange.'"

As he prepared to turn back, and ask the landlady the way to "Water Grange," he stopped and gazed down the narrow street. A trap was dashing up at full speed, as though the driver were flogging his steed on a matter of life and death.

And the colour in the financier's cheeks paled to a ghastly green as he saw the face of the man who was driving.

(Another grand instalment next week.)

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ANÆMIA.

BY MRS. ADA S. BALLIN,

Editor of "Womanhood," and of "Baby: the Mothers' Magazine."

ANÆMIA, or bloodlessness, is one of the commonest troubles of the present age—so common, in fact, that it seems to me that quite two-thirds of the girls one comes in contact with in towns are affected with it. The complaint can hardly be called a disease in the ordinary sense of the word, but is rather a debilitated state of the body, which lays it open to the attacks of most other kinds of diseases.

Symptoms.

The condition in question is characterised by a deficiency in the number of red corpuscles in the blood. There is very often pallor of the cheeks and lips, but in some cases these may be of a natural colour, and lead even the patient to believe that she is not anæmic, when the real state of the case can instantly be discovered by examining the gums and the insides of the eyelids. These, instead of being of a good deep pink, are pale and yellowish-looking. The tongue is apt to be pale and flabby, and indented by the teeth; the sufferer is readily fatigued, troubled with breathlessness on going up and down stairs; she very often suffers from palpitation or pains about the heart, which may lead her to believe that she is suffering from some disease of the heart. She suffers frequently from headache, pains in the back, and languor, and soon becomes very tired by any little unusual exertion. She may even faint, and thus cause considerable anxiety to her family. There are frequent eruptions on the skin, which may be either of an irritating kind, or simply acne either in the form of blackheads or pimples, or both.

There are two kinds of anæmia—one the common kind of which I have spoken, and another called pernicious anæmia, which is a fatal disease, and most difficult of treatment, but is happily rare.

Pernicious Anæmia.

In such cases there is wasting, and yellowishness of the skin, which assumes an almost transparent waxen hue; but these cases, of course, demand the most skilled medical attention and nursing within reach, and do not come within the province of this paper. I may, however, remark that the best remedy to improve the condition of the blood in these cases, which is now being very largely prescribed by the medical profession, is Hæmatogen, manufactured by Messrs. Nicolay and Co., 36, St. Andrew's Hill, London, E.C., which contains, in a purified form, hæmoglobin, the natural colouring matter of the blood, rich in organic iron and albumen, as well as the mineral salts, including the phosphates of soda and potash which are found in meat. It is far better to give a preparation like this, which is a food and nourishes the blood, than to give iron in a mineral form, which so often upsets the digestion. Hæmatogen contains nothing besides what I have mentioned, except chemically pure glycerine, which is in itself nourishing, and a very small proportion of the best Malaga wine, which is used as a flavouring.

Ordinary Anæmia.

Is a condition of everyday occurrence, in which the doctor is rarely called in, or if he is, he just prescribes for the time being, and after a few weeks the patient is apt to get as bad again. Any line of treatment for ordinary cases of anæmia must be persistently applied, and, although occasional visits to the doctor, if there seems anything out of the way amiss, are desirable, the treatment can only be properly carried out at home.

The Causes.

The causes of anæmia are chiefly bad ventilation, insufficient or unsuitable feeding, want of exercise, and sedentary occupations, or that overwork of the brain just now so common in young ladies at high schools and preparing for examinations.

General Management of Health during Anæmia.

All anæmic persons should be in the fresh air as much as possible, so that the blood may become oxygenated, and an anæmic girl who is not really ill should take exercise for at least an hour twice daily. Walking, cycling, swimming (if the heart is not weak), rowing and tennis are all suitable. Eight hours' sleep is not too much, as the brain, being badly supplied with blood, needs extra rest, and in some cases even nine hours' sleep may be indulged in with advantage. The bedroom, however, should be well ventilated, and here I may mention that it is a great mistake to keep a gas jet burning, as it destroys the oxygen in the air; anæmic persons need very much oxygen, which is essential to keep the blood pure. In order to keep the blood pure also, the skin should be kept healthily active, and a daily bath is essential.

Meals should be regular, and in many cases it is desirable to take extra nourishment between the ordinary meals.—Plenty of meat and green vegetables should be taken, cocoa instead of tea, and wholemeal bread instead of white.

Iron as a Medicine.

Iron is a food to all anæmic persons, and must not be regarded by them as a medicine only to be taken temporarily, for in most cases it is necessary to persevere in taking iron for a period varying from two months to five or six years. I am strongly opposed to the ordinary methods of giving iron in anæmia, which are very frequently worse than useless, as the iron is so often decomposed, or in a form that is indigestible, when the patient takes it; while when given in a pill such as Blaud's pill, it is apt to pass through the body quite undigested, and a patient might as well swallow a bullet. As ordinarily given, also, iron is very apt to cause constipation, and for these reasons Hæmatogen, which I have mentioned above, should invariably be given in preference to other preparations. It is best to begin with a teaspoonful dose, taken half-an-hour after breakfast and half-an-hour before lunch and dinner. The object for giving it before meals is to stimulate the appetite and assist the assimilation of other food, but if taken before breakfast it is apt to prove rather aperient. In cases, therefore, where the girl has a tendency to constipation, it is a very simple remedy to take the Hæmatogen half-an-hour before breakfast, as well as before the other meals. The dose should be gradually increased to a tablespoonful. When this is taken for a few weeks the effect is really remarkable; the quality of the blood rapidly improves, the sallow cheeks grow rosy, and the pale lips red, while the feelings of languor and depression pass off, and the girl grows cheerful, bright, and fit to take her place in the world.

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

The Impossibility of Loving Two Men.

"QUEENIE" writes to know if it is possible to love two young men with equal affection? —"No, QUEENIE," it is not. Either you love one better than the other, or you really are not in love with either. You merely have a liking for them. Put yourself to the test. Try to imagine that one of them has proposed and you have accepted him; think over his character generally; then ask yourself if you would like to spend your life with him. If you do this with all seriousness—as you would do before accepting an offer of marriage—you will not be long in discovering the true state of your feelings.

Differences with a Sweetheart.

"J. A. C." has a whole lot of complaints to make against his sweetheart. To begin with, she objects to his playing football, which is "J. A. C.'s" favourite hobby. She has only called him "dear" three times, and never of her own accord told him that she loves him. She holds that a girl who tells her mind to her boy means nothing. "J. A. C." wants to know if I think she really loves him.

* * * * *

Well, if she objects to your playing football, I should think she does feel a sort of ownership of you, and, therefore, I suppose, loves you. The fact that she has not called you "dear" shows nothing. It may mean simply that she is a sensible girl, who doesn't believe in mere spoken love. Again, even if she has never told you she loves you, her anxiety to have you always with her shows that she really is fond of you. If it is not her nature to gush, you should not expect her to do so. After all, surely people can love each other without telling each other of it every other minute.

Troubles of a Young Old Maid.

"AN OLD MAID."—You are twenty-six, and all your previous love affairs have ended badly. Now you feel it time that you met some man whom you could really love and marry. You are fascinating, and not a love-sick maiden, or given to worrying.

* * * * *

Well, what can I advise you? You certainly do seem to have had a lot of bad luck in your love affairs. From what you tell me I think you cannot have really cared for any of the young men to whom you were engaged, or they would not have left you in the way they did. It must be that you think too much of the opposite sex. As you seem to have attracted so many men in the past, and are still as fascinating as ever, I can only advise you to keep up a cheerful countenance, and hope that you will soon attract somebody else. When you get him hold him as fast as you can. By the way, don't start calling yourself an old maid yet. That old maid idea grows on one, and should not be encouraged.

A Reque t to Correspondents.

MAY I ask a favour of my correspondents? In writing to me, would they oblige me by stating the point on which they want advice in as few words as possible? This week several readers have written me letters of eight pages each. Though no doubt the details given me are of interest to the writer, they do not affect the point on which my advice is asked, and make matters difficult to understand. In stating the position of a love affair it is not necessary to give the ages, occupations, and family history of everybody concerned, unless they bear on the question.

An Unworthy Friend.

YOUR dearest friend, "TROUBLED ONE," is indeed not worthy the name of a friend. I must say you were indiscreet to confide in her your love of a man to whom you had never spoken. Nineteen is very young, and you will most probably meet someone who suits you far better than this man. I should let it stand as it is. To write and explain to any man that you are "passionately in love" with him, would only be to place you in a very awkward position, and as things stand you surely can carry it off as a joke. No nice-minded girl would care to be thought pushing or forward.

The Duties of a Lover.

"SAXON."—You admit that you have given the girl you speak of good cause for offence, and I should suggest your writing to her first, if you really wish to become reconciled. But neither of you seems to have acted in the past as people really fond of each other. If a man really wants to meet a girl, "SAXON," he *doesn't* miss his train, and when she telegraphs him to go and visit her, he *doesn't* have prior engagements with friends. My only advice is, decide whether or not you really love the girl, and if you do, write to her to overlook your lack of attention, and if you should come together again, don't have quite so many other friends, and keep your appointments with her, even if earthquakes intervene.

Too Sensitive by Half.

YOUR conduct, "CLAUDE," is very foolish; I will not use any harder expression. You are dearly in love with a girl who, you believe, would make you an excellent wife. She is domesticated and loving, but she has not had the opportunity of educating herself to a great extent. She is doing her best to remedy this defect, and your friends tell you that your choice is a good one. But you are afraid of what your fellow-clerks might say, so you propose to break off the engagement. Perhaps you will see how unmanly and foolish your conduct is when you read it in black and white. Trust to your mother's instinct; she, who has your welfare at heart, advises you to marry the young woman, and a mother's love makes her far-sighted.

To Renew an Acquaintance.

"HARRY" says that he passed a young lady who bowed to him, without noticing her. It afterwards occurred to him that she was none other than a girl he loved when a boy. How can he remedy his apparent slight?—I should advise you to send a line to the lady on general subjects, wishing her the compliments of the season, and mention, incidentally that it only occurred to you after she had passed the other day that the young lady who smiled so sweetly was none other than herself, your early love, and attribute it to your short-sightedness. If you word it very nicely, she may overlook your offence, and perhaps ask you to tea, in which case you will be able to resume the love-making operations you had to break off previously.

Cynthia

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